

JERSEY EARLY YEARS ASSOCIATION

'TODAY'S ASSOCIATION FOR TOMORROW'S CHILD'

Early Years Review

1st June 07

In response to your letter, dated 15th May 2007, to review the proposal of 20 hours early education per week for 38 weeks per year, JEYA offers the following comments.

JEYA is the organisation representing all private child care providers. Together those providers care for and educate over 1500 young children around the island.

For the past 4 years we have tirelessly campaigned for equity in Early Years provision with the States Nurseries. We have now reached the point where by ESC and the Council of Ministers has agreed in principle that the current situation of inequity is unfair.

Background

In 1989 the former Education Committee made a commitment to offer a nursery class place to every 3 & 4 yr old child whose parents want one. The places were offered as part time sessions either morning or afternoon. In 2003 the education department decided to change policy and move to a full time place from 9am to 3pm for three reasons: –

1. Morning places were full but afternoons were not
2. To bring the nursery classes closer to a standard school day
3. To assist working parents

This policy was not in the best interests of the children as schools close for 14 weeks per year so there was no continuity of care for these very young children. There is now only one school intake per year even though the law has not changed and children do not legally have to be at school until the term of their 5th birthday. However, this has had a major impact on the private sector:

- Mass exodus of children every September – this is unsettling and upsetting for the children who lose lots of their friends. Parents with children born between January and the end of August may find difficulty in accessing a nursery place before the following September
- Younger children accommodated at substantial extra cost as the staffing ratios for under three's are much higher and this cost is passed to the parent
- Nursery fees increased
- Parents prefer free places – no-one can compete in a fair market with 'free'
- Some pre-schools closed due to lack of children
- Illegal/unregistered child minders were inadvertently encouraged as the costs increased and the access to nursery places was limited (due to school intake)

Other factors that have affected child care costs are the ineffective Child Care Allowance that very few can access (the threshold is too low) and tax relief that only helps the more affluent parents.

In response :

- 1. To consider what is required for the effective delivery of early years education and care, with particular regards to the needs of:**
 - a. The children need:
 - A safe, warm, secure, stimulating environment
 - Continuity of care

- Opportunity to play and develop in an appropriate environment
 - Equity of access
- b. The parents need:
- Affordable, accessible, registered childcare & education for their child
 - Freedom to choose what is best for their child regardless of financial status
 - Parental involvement and close contact with the Key Person caring for their child
 - Equity of access (not lottery)
 - Non-discriminatory access to Child Care Allowance, tax systems, parish welfare
 - A government that listens to and supports them
- c. The providers need:
- Access to funding to survive the current economic climate
 - Respect from the public sector for their role & commitment in Early Years
 - To work in partnership with other Early years Care & Education (ECE) providers
 - To share and acknowledge differing expertise
 - Equitable access to training for all practitioners regardless of setting
 - Recognition of their qualifications, continuous professional development and expertise in Early Years
 - A government that listens to and supports them
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:**
- a. Cost and resource implications
- Investment in Early Years has been shown to pay dividends in later life
 - ESC proposal to offer every child 20hrs is a step forward but does not provide equity unless the other 10 free hours received by children in the nursery classes is paid for by those parents
 - JCCT would no longer need to fund raise for the supported places they currently offer
 - Funding of £1.5 million remains an issue
 - ESC are currently diluting services in the nursery classes by taking in a higher number of children at a ratio of 1 adult to 10.50 children (as opposed to the private sector ratio of 1 adult to 8 children) –cost implication to public & private sector
 - The cheapest option for ESC is to offer a part-time place to every 3 & 4 yr old thereby fulfilling their original commitment and at no further cost to the tax payer
 - Alternatively put the 4 yr olds into the nursery classes and put back schooling for one year – research shows this to be in the best interests of the child as formal schooling too soon has been shown to be detrimental in the future
 - The employment of a new co-ordinator for implementation of new strategy is unnecessary – this could be a role for the new partnership
- b. Equity of access
- The offer of 20hrs is a step in the right direction but is not equitable
 - If ESC continues to offer 30 hrs then parents should pay the extra 10 hrs at the same rate as private providers receive to achieve equity
 - ESC could offer part-time places only to achieve equity
 - The current system creates political unrest & division between sectors, parents & tax payers
 - Private sector parents pay twice – nursery fees + tax that pays for nursery classes
 - Equity may reduce the need for illegal/unregistered care

c. 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 civil servants and politicians.

Current issues:

- Relevant training for ECE
- Differing staff / child ratios
- Differing standards and regulatory policy between nursery classes and private providers
- Definition of quality – ESC presume they know best – simply not true
- Continuous professional development
- Parental partnerships
- Transition to school
- Lack of debate

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

d. Expectations and requirements of parents who wish to work

- Safe, secure, warm, stimulating environment for their child
- Affordable, accessible ECE
- Freedom of choice of ECE
- Flexible working hours
- Caring employers
- Government willing to take responsibility and invest in a strategy that supports families & encourages mothers to work to support the economy

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.

There is no current integrated strategy so ESC has put together a possible solution that they believe is feasible in response to parent and provider lobbying. Although not ideal it is a step in the right direction. The 'sticking plaster' approach to an integrated strategy is not the answer!

An integrated strategy from 0 to 12 years should be part of a commitment from the States of Jersey not solely the responsibility of Education, Sport & Culture.

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.

- Imagine the impact on the economy if all working mothers stayed at home

- Loss of workforce
- Loss of skills
- Increased immigration
- Whole social structure of the Island changes
- Impacts on housing, health & education
- Impact on welfare or income support
- Impact on taxes

Summary

JEYA recognises that many parents are in need of affordable, accessible childcare and education. This situation requires **urgent attention**.

JEYA acknowledges the time and effort that Education, Sport and Culture have given to the issue of inequity in early years, however **funding** remains an issue.

JEYA has concerns for children who may be at risk in unregistered childcare.

JEYA believes that if the Government wants a local workforce to support the economy and keep population under control then it is the Government's responsibility to provide financial incentives to encourage mothers back into the workforce

JEYA believes the way forward to be the formation of a partnership between the private and public sector that, by sharing knowledge and expertise, creates the opportunity for open and honest debate on issues and differences. The mutually beneficial partnership could then by agreement offer appropriate advice to the government in support of children and their families.

JEYA is willing to discuss these issues in further depth if required.

FURTHER THOUGHTS (from a JEYA member)

When the States first started to give money to nursery education/care, what was their aim? Was it to

1. Give parents time to work and contribute greater taxes and reduce immigration?
2. Educate 3yr olds so as children would be 'cleverer' by the time they were 16?
3. Give children with a poor start in life a better chance?
4. Increase the size of the teaching industry and associated civil service in Jersey?

Aims 1, 2 and 3 could have been better achieved (at a lower cost) with a rigorous private/public partnership, however point 4 would not have been met. History shows that the education department has failed point 1, undoubtedly the department had a level of success with point 2 and 3 (as have the private sector), and the department had **huge success with point 4. In fact so great has the education departments' success been with point 4; that upon reflection one can only surmise that the question of constraint on the department's size and growth has never been an issue.** (To the cynic one may say that departmental growth has been an aim rather than a by-product of the provision of early years education in Jersey)