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27<sup>th</sup> September 2024

Dear Catherine,

### **Review of the Government's Proposed Budget 2025 – 2028**

Thank you for your letter and invitation to provide a formal submission to the above review. We would be pleased to contribute our comments about the proposals to 'extend nursery and childcare provision'.

#### **Background**

Jersey Child Care Trust is a registered charity that delivers programmes to give around 200 children a year their best start in life. It is our vision that every child receives the nurture, care and learning they need to thrive.

Our Best Start Plus Nursery Funding Programme (BSPNF) funds between 80 – 100 part time nursery places each year for 2 – 3 year olds, living in poverty and with developmental delays. Until now, the nursery places have only been within registered, local day nurseries and pre-schools.

#### **General Comments re Extend Nursery and Childcare Provision**

We are encouraged by the Government's proposals to invest in services and support for children in their early years and their families.

Specifically around nursery provision for 2 – 3 year olds, the proposed targeted approach is supported by a wealth of research that shows the greatest impact of this type of investment is experienced by those living in poverty and with developmental delays. By July 2024, 10 children had been unable to find a nursery

place and therefore missed out on accessing the BSPNF Programme for that academic year. It is with these two aspects in mind that following an approach by the Minister for Education, the Jersey Child Care Trust is opening 'Play and Learn at d'Auvergne' on 14<sup>th</sup> October with home visits and inductions then taking place for families. This new registered nursery will be for children who meet the criteria for our BSPNF Programme and will ensure that children who currently require a nursery place can access one.

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*Putting families first*

Play and Learn will not only provide 12 hours of early years education and care over four days to children, but we have incorporated a session for parents to join their children to play and learn together on a Friday with our team. Our future plans incorporate our professional partners in the child and family arena to join these sessions to introduce new knowledge, skills and practice to everyone whilst continuing to develop trusting and supportive relationships with families.

We accept that this model is not well aligned to our ideals or principles around inclusive practice. This is because only children who meet the criteria for our BSPNF Programme will secure a place, however, we are creating opportunities for children and families who otherwise would be missing out, at a time when it matters most for them developmentally. It would therefore be our aspiration that before any plans to consider expanding the Play and Learn concept to potentially other schools, that all stakeholders collectively consider how we can do this with the principles of inclusive practice at the heart.

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

With the Minister's focus currently on supporting 2-3 year olds with additional needs, in our experience, these children often find it more challenging to secure a nursery place. We are aware of some discriminatory practice by early years settings that has occurred for families who are funded through our BSPNF Programme, with one provider refusing to offer places to these children.

There is also currently a mismatch between policy and actual practice around inclusion. Whilst processes are in place that include the Government's Early Years Inclusion Team and requirements for the early years providers to make reasonable adjustments and ensure inclusion, as laid out by the Regulatory Requirements and inspected by the Childcare and Early Years Service, the reality is sometimes different.

Also, young children with additional needs require good quality interactions, little and often. The business model preferred (possibly *required* to make it financially viable) by the private early years sector is now long morning or afternoon sessions or all day. The two needs; business and child development, do not seem aligned and perhaps some work is required to reach a model that best meets both needs.

### **We would also like to comment on the impact that these plans could have on children and families**

We are led by the principles around good quality inclusive practice. In ideal circumstances, all settings would have capacity with trained and experienced staff with ratios to enable all children to be included in any setting, irrespective of their needs. The benefits of this inclusive approach would be experienced by all children, staff and families. Creating a new provision only for children with additional needs goes against these principles. We have, however mobilised swiftly to open Play and Learn because we do not want any more families to miss out on these learning and development opportunities at such a critical time in their lives.

### **How training and development for staff in the Early Years Sector could be improved**

Relevant training and development opportunities exist for early years staff but flexibility is key.

The Level 3 course is either delivered full time or day release over two years. Both intakes are September and require full attendance at Highlands College. There are so many alternative and more flexible ways that this course could be delivered and competencies assessed; e.g. online, workplace assessment with in-house

assessors (Quality Assured by Highlands), accreditation for prior learning or experience and flexibility to dip in and out of study units that are delivered across the year rather than academic year. This greater flexibility

would allow students to better work, study and manage their family lives and potentially lead to a lower dropout rate.

We have provided thousands of CPD places to the children's workforce including MAYBO, Makaton and Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) courses and adaptability to our audience is key. In our experience, flexibility in how, when and where these are delivered and to whom, is key to good attendance and eventual implementation of the new skills acquired.

Re Inclusive Practice: MAYBO and Good Autism Practice should be mandatory training going forwards, the requirements written into the Regulations and the Minister's plans to include funding to enable these courses to run.

Finally, this sector has historically been often expected to attend a range of training and development courses in the evening after a busy and long shift and usually unpaid. Offering a payment to settings to enable the release of staff to attend training would make a significant impact on levels of attendance, ability to learn and feeling valued.

### **How the recruitment and retention of Early Years staff could be improved**

There is some existing activity around recruitment within the Best Start Partnership. Promotional materials have been produced and early years will be represented at careers events. A shift towards a Living Wage for all will also certainly help however, we also need some solid data around average rates of pay and some standardisation of roles.

A focus on retention however is even more necessary with some initial exploration around why the workforce are leaving and where they are going. It would also be useful to focus on settings that have good staff retention rates and explore the differences between them and settings that have higher turnover rates.

In recruiting to our new nursery called Play and Learn at d'Auvergne, opening 14<sup>th</sup> October, we expected a significant challenge in recruiting to the three new positions requiring a Level 3 qualification. However, we received 24 expressions of interest in our part time, term time positions with 80% qualified but not currently working in the sector. We also have a team of 18 Special Needs Inclusion Programme Support Workers, with minimal turnover of staff.

Our leadership works hard to focus on JCCT being recognised as an employer of choice, looking for ways to offer flexibility, support and development opportunities. Perhaps creating opportunities to access some financial and/or practical support for those settings who want to sign up to offering this way of working could have some impact here.

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

There was an extensive piece of consultative work that took place with 24 different stakeholders, independently facilitated by the ISOS Partnership that was to inform early years policy making in the future, taking account of the needs of children and families. This work was informed by extensive evidence from well-respected and known research and we would expect the findings of this report to inform and proposed changes. <https://www.gov.je/News/2024/pages/earlyyearsfuturepolicy.aspx>

Yours sincerely



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