

Report

States of Jersey

**Examination of the options for
providing early childhood
education and care for children
in Jersey.**

Date: January 2007

Author: Nicky Road

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Current context
3. New proposals
4. Examination of the options
 - i. Providing free, universal nursery education for all 3 and 4 year olds
 - ii. Introducing charges and means testing
 - iii. Extending the nursery education offer to the private and voluntary sector
5. Summary
6. Conclusion

1. Introduction

In January 2007 the States of Jersey Department for Education, Sport sought independent early education and childcare advice from the consultancy service at the National Daycare Trust. The purpose of the consultancy was to draw upon the wide range of experience of extending education and childcare that exists in England and elsewhere, to assist in considering the various options relevant to the States of Jersey to extend early education. Key themes that needed to be addressed were around equity, accessibility and affordability.

The Assistant Director for Schools and Colleges met with the Daycare Trust consultant on 24th and 25th January. The terms of reference for these two days were:

- To explore issues around the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture's strategy for developing the Early Years agenda in Jersey;
- Drawing upon the independent consultant's experience, to comment on the proposals

This report summarises the key areas that were explored and provides a commentary on the proposals based on knowledge and experience of this sector.

2. Current Context

The Education, Sport & Culture Committee set out its early years vision in a report on 5th July 2005. A key plank was that, within three years, all three and four year olds would have access to affordable, high quality early education and care for up to 30 hours per week for 38 weeks per year, for those parents wishing to access this.

Due to the growth in nursery class places, 49% of three and four years olds had access to nursery class provision for up to 30 hours per week by 2005. In order to realise this vision within the state sector it was anticipated that it will take a further 20 years. The annual cohort of children able to access this provision is approximately 1000. Currently the majority of places are full time and the provision is free for 30 hours per week.

Alongside nursery education are the private and voluntary sector childcare providers. As elsewhere, some of this provision caters for children from 0 to 5 but in practice some children leave at 3 to access free education if they are able to do so. Childcare services are registered under the Daycare Registration (Jersey) Law 2002, for 0 to 12 year olds.

As childcare costs are high there is currently inequity in that 3 and 4 year olds in the state sector receive free educational provision for up to 30 hours a week but those in the private and voluntary sector do not. However one way of addressing this is the central allocation of nursery education places based on criteria of need.

The quality of the nursery education offered by the state is of high quality. The evidence for this judgement exists in evaluations of States primary schools undertaken since 1994. This review did not therefore focus on the delivery of quality education. However, if issues of equity and access are to be addressed, the private and voluntary sector needs to be considered in any review of the provision of quality nursery education to ensure quality and consistency across both sectors. The workforce profile between the two sectors is different and mirrors the different

professional routes that historically exist between education and care. Nursery classes have a qualified teacher with an assistant, whereas childcare services employ nursery nurses and early years staff with vocational qualifications. These settings rarely include teachers due to differences that exist between salaries and terms and conditions between schools and childcare settings. However, many of these providers are committed to providing the Foundation Stage curriculum in their settings and the Department for Education, Sport and Culture employs a Foundation Stage teacher specifically to support to them.

The other aspect of ensuring access and affordability is the profile of the children and families who wish to access childcare and education. The new Income Support System that is being introduced shortly, replacing the previous Childcare Allowance, is likely to benefit primarily low earners. However, anyone who has been on the Island for less than 5 years will not be eligible for support. This will affect migrant workers, primarily Portuguese and Polish, who come to Jersey to meet the labour shortage and often take up lower paid jobs. Whilst many families traditionally rely on extended families to provide childcare, particularly those working in the low paid sector, this is not usually an option for migrant families whose families remain at home.

Linked to both cost and meeting parental need is the requirement for flexible childcare. Whilst this review focused on services for 3 and 4 year olds, it is important to note that any developments catering for this group of children are likely to impact on services for the under 3s too. Nursery education is currently provided full time i.e. 30 hours a week. This decision was influenced by an earlier Audit Commission's recommendation that part-time places do not represent good value for money if they remain empty. Previous experience in Jersey was that afternoon places were not popular with parents. However a full-time nursery place does not cover the working day and is not intended to provide childcare. Parents seeking longer hours rely on wrap-around care or full time childcare. Non-working parents who wish their children to benefit from nursery education may prefer shorter hours. Currently they have limited choice.

3. New proposals

Given the time it will take to meet the commitment of providing nursery education within the state sector for all 3 and 4 year olds, combined with issues around equity, affordability and the sustainability of the private and voluntary sectors, the current arrangements are under review and options to be considered include:

- providing a free entitlement of 20 hours per week for all 3 and 4 year olds by extending the nursery education entitlement to private and voluntary sector childcare providers;
- introducing charges for nursery education and means testing for all.

4. Examination of the Options

The two options above contain a number of different elements and are interlinked. I will therefore comment on the separate elements in the following way:

- i. Providing free, universal nursery education for all 3 and 4 year olds;
- ii. Introducing charges and means testing;

- iii. Extending the nursery education offer to the private and voluntary sector.

i. Providing free, universal nursery education for all 3 and 4 year olds

The vision and commitment to provide free nursery education in Jersey has already been made. The dilemma for the States of Jersey, as with all governments, is the time it takes to deliver on this commitment and the costs involved. Clearly the policy is popular, given that nursery education is high quality and free.

The advantages of maintaining free universal nursery education have been well documented in previous reports to Ministers, drawing on research findings from the Effectiveness Provision of Pre-School Educationⁱ (EPPE), the American Highscope programme and others. High quality early education is directly related to better outcomes for all children, with significantly better outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Experience in the UK suggests that the gaps in outcomes are widening between children with those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds lagging behind educationally and socially. As a result, the new Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to set early learning and development targets for all children to ensure that the most disadvantaged children benefit threefold from their early learning experience.

The provision of 30 hours per week free nursery education is generous. The research findings on the benefits of quality early education suggest that the maximum educational benefit may accrue in 20 hours per week. This would support the Minister's proposal for a free element providing quality can be assured. Important factors in assuring the quality of provisions for children relate to the quality of the staff in terms of higher qualifications, experience and continuity. In England, the free nursery education entitlement will increase from 12.5 hours per week for 38 weeks a year to 15 hours a week by 2010 and subsequently to 20 hours a week.ⁱⁱ Whilst the sharp distinction between education and childcare for young children is now changing, the principle still remains that education is free and childcare is a charge to parents. Childcare services for the under threes, both in the UK and in Europe where there is a long tradition of publicly funded daycare, charge a fee to parents, often on a sliding scale. A reduction in the number of hours of free nursery education from 30 to 20 hours would not have a negative impact on the educational outcomes for children and would be similar to the goal that the UK is aiming to achieve in the longer term.

Currently there is free, quality nursery education in Jersey. To achieve universal provision in the short term suggests that provision needs to be opened up within the private and voluntary sector. This would need to be funded appropriately to achieve both the free entitlement and to sustain the desired level of quality.

ii. Introducing charges and means testing

Providing a free, universal service has the clear advantage in that it does not discriminate against any sector of the population and is simple to promote and administer. However, it could be argued that it is not fair to offer all parents, regardless of their means, a free service. If better-off parents were charged or if all parents were charged on a sliding scale, the money generated could be invested in extending and improving the nursery education service.

The distinction between childcare and education has already been made. Parents needing childcare for 0 to 3 year olds who are unable to secure a free provided place have to pay. Childcare costs in Jersey are high and equivalent to London costs. In the UK the Government has largely encouraged the expansion of childcare through subsidising parents, via tax relief etc. rather than through subsidising provision. However the high cost of childcare is one of the major barriers to families wishing to access childcare and particularly disadvantages the low paid.ⁱⁱⁱ A range of Government sponsored initiatives are therefore being developed in London to address this problem – from providing a subsidy on fees, called the Childcare Affordability Programme^{iv}, to providing time-limited free places for young and single parents, those parents wishing to access training etc. This piecemeal response is complex to promote and administer and the system of publicly funded subsidies can escalate childcare costs.

There is much research evidence to suggest that the lowest take-up of early education and childcare is by certain Black and minority ethnic groups (BME)^v. The reasons range from different BME communities not knowing about the advantages of nursery education in terms of socialising, language development and transition to mainstream education, fear of the unfamiliar and charges. In Jersey, the children of Portuguese and Polish workers are likely to be particularly disadvantaged. Their parents would not be eligible for Income Support until they have been resident in the Island for five years. Consequently they are likely to be denied a nursery education experience and may seek unregistered care. This would have a negative impact on those children in terms of their overall educational achievement and when they start school they could have an impact on other children who have already had the benefits of settling into a learning, socialising environment..

iii. Extending the nursery education offer to the private sector

The arguments for extending the nursery education offer are quite powerful. Regardless of parental circumstances and whether or not childcare is required, all children receive the same nursery education entitlement regardless of setting. There is equity because parents are entitled to the same offer whether in the public or private sector and they may be assured that their child is receiving the same educational benefits. From the private and voluntary sector providers' perspective, they are operating in a fair environment.

The benefits to the state are that the commitment to deliver nursery education for all 3 and 4 years olds could be achieved more quickly by accessing provision that already exists without incurring additional capital costs or affecting the sustainability of the private sector. Also the cost of providing nursery education could be controlled.

However the challenges to the States in extending the offer are significant. Whilst setting out the benefits to providers of the free option described above it would need to be sufficiently attractive for them to wish to join the programme. The public nursery education subsidy would need to be set at a realistic level, with an inflation index, to make providers willing to join and comply with any conditions set around the delivery of quality education. For example in England, to ensure that parents can access their free nursery education entitlement within daycare settings, providers are not allowed to charge top-up fees for these hours.

Currently there is a separate registration and inspection process for daycare providers and education. Whilst this can be retained, any provider agreeing to deliver

nursery education would need to comply with the Foundation Stage curriculum requirements. This could impact on the differences that exist within the early years workforce around qualifications and professional development. Further investment in training and development for the whole sector may need to be made. Building effective partnerships between nursery classes and daycare providers could involve the development of mentoring and peer support schemes and placement opportunities to model best practice etc.

In the UK, to support the delivery of the national childcare strategy, a number of developments are now in place and may have some relevance to the States of Jersey. The Nursery Education Fund^{vi} initiative, administered by local authorities, is supporting the extension of the free nursery education entitlement across the private and voluntary sectors. A new integrated registration and inspection process for daycare and education from 0 to 8 years is being implemented in recognition of the fact that young children have both care and education needs and to simplify the current arrangements where one provider can be inspected against two different sets of criteria. The new Early Years Foundation Stage is integrating Birth to Three Matters and the Foundation Stage and will be in place by 2008. The new graduate Early Years Professional Program, will provide career opportunities for early years staff and ultimately replace teachers in all children's centres and full time daycare. This is being developed to address the different qualification routes and experiences across the early years sector. Adapting elements from some of these initiatives may help to support the integration of the sector.

5. Summary

Drawing on experience from elsewhere in exploring the implications of implementing any of the options below:

- providing a free entitlement of 20 hours per week for all 3 and 4 year olds by extending the nursery education entitlement to private and voluntary sector childcare providers;
- introducing charges for nursery education and means testing for all;

the following issues emerged.

Providing universal nursery education for all 3 and 4 year olds would be achievable in the near future if this were extended to the private and voluntary daycare providers. Currently there are 520 children accessing 480 nursery class places at 30 hours per week. It is calculated that the current annual cohort of 1000 children will reduce to 830 per annum. The number of places for 3 to 4 year olds in day nurseries and pre-school has been calculated at 435. With minimal growth in provision, and assuming that all providers join the nursery education programme, it would be possible to meet demand.

The cost of extending nursery education through public subsidy to the private and voluntary sector would need to be calculated. This subsidy would need to be sufficiently attractive to providers and they would need to be prevented from charging top-up fees otherwise childcare costs could escalate.

Additional expenditure may need to be put in place to support private and voluntary providers to deliver quality nursery education. This may be used to support the acquisition of early years qualifications and continuing professional development.

Continuing to provide free nursery education across the whole sector would build on the strengths of current educational provision which is well supported, popular and recognised as high quality.

Introducing charges and means testing for nursery education would have a disproportionate impact on low income and migrant families and may encourage other parents to seek sessions rather than a continuous educational experience. It is possible that the children who would most benefit from quality nursery education would be denied it.

6. Conclusion

The situation that currently exists whereby the States of Jersey is providing free quality nursery education, places it at the forefront of other countries wishing to achieve such a position. For a relatively limited amount of further investment this could be extended to all children who wish to access it. Introducing charging and means testing is fraught with difficulties and would have a negative impact on the core principles of securing equity, accessibility and affordability.

The early education and care vision, as set out in Committee reports, suggests that commitment by the States of Jersey has already been secured. As in the UK, with the adoption of the national childcare strategy, the case has been proven that investment in the early years helps to secure the future well being of children and provide long term economic and social benefits for society. The issue that remains is how best to achieve the complete solution and this could be achieved by building an effective partnership between the private and voluntary sectors, parents and the States of Jersey.

ⁱ The Effective provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project Institute of Education, University of London, 2003

ⁱⁱ Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare HM Treasury 2004

ⁱⁱⁱ Universal early education and care in 2020: costs, benefits and funding options Daycare Trust 2004

^{iv} Childcare Affordability Programme funded by the London Development Agency & Sure Start 2006

^v Sure Start: For Everyone- Inclusion Pilot Projects Summary Report 2004
Refugee children in the early years: issues for policy-makers & providers Save the Children: 1998
Ensuring Equality: black and minority ethnic families' views on childcare Daycare Trust 2006

^{vi} The Nursery Education Fund Guidance, DfES 2006