



Early Years Policy Development Board

Headlines from Focus Groups

Background

The Early Years Policy Development Board (EYPDB), chaired by the Minister for Education is seeking to understand parental viewpoints and experiences of Early Childhood Care and Education in Jersey.

In order to understand more about the opinions and experiences of **Parents/Carers** during their child's Early Years (from conception to five years old) the EYPDB commissioned 4insight to run 6 focus groups with parents and carers from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The aim was to identify the key themes for parents and identify potential areas for policy change

The following slides are a high-level summary of the findings.

Research Aim and Objectives

The research project **aim** was to understand parental viewpoints and experiences of Early Childhood Care and Education.

Specific **objectives** included exploring:

- what support is or should be available?
- what services do families have or should have access to?
- what advice or information is considered important and whether it is easily located/accessed or not?
- what do parents/carers understand Early Childhood Education to be and to what extent and what elements do they see the Government being responsible for?
- what challenges do parents/carers face in the period from conception to five? (including emotional, social, financial)
- when do parents/carers believe they need help most and who do they think is best placed to offer it?

Outcome: Provide public views and perceptions to inform and help develop detailed policy proposals, as part of the Policy Development Board's remit, built upon evidence based research

Project scope, sample and methodology

Scope:

Jersey islanders who are currently parents of 0 to 5 year olds or planning on soon being a parent



Sample:

All respondents were recruited and screened to an agreed screener questionnaire to achieve a good mix of social demographics (87), excluding those in the media or actively involved in politics.

Focus group participants (42);

- 6 men, 36 women across a range of income levels and living situations (social housing, private rental, own home, parents)

- 14 living in St Helier, rest split across parishes

- 18 Jersey born, 14 UK born, others from 10 different countries including Portugal and Eastern European countries

- teenage single mums to mums in late 30s/early 40s

- 18 F/T working mums, 12 P/T, 2 self employed, 2 unemployed, 2 students, 6 stay at home parents

- Total annual household income very varied from 4 on < £20K, 13 £20-60K, 9 £60-100K, 5 £100-150, 2 £150K+, 9 PNTS

- 4 pregnant/planning to be pregnant

- 27 had 2 children, 11 had 1, 1 had 3, 1 had 7 – some had special needs children

- 4 had babies 0-6months, 11 had 6-24 months, 34 had 2-4 year olds, 21 had 5-12 year olds as well

- 27 in private nurseries, 16 in school nurseries, 6 with a child minder, 12 a family member caring for them

- 7 single parents, 3 living with a partner, 32 married

- 20 of the 42 had no family support here at all**

Methodology:

Professional focus groups held in our viewing facilities allowing observation, listening and extra live questioning. Projective techniques utilised in discussion guide to explore emotional in addition to rational views. Each focus group 90-120 mins.

Main themes

Cost

- The cost of childcare was a huge theme amongst all groups. All felt that childcare was expensive and for some hard to find. Many also mentioned related to the high cost of living in Jersey
- Many felt the nurseries were too expensive and they were working just “to make ends meet”
- Many mentioned the financial cost of not working vs working, the trade offs they had to do

Breastfeeding

- A key theme amongst all groups was breastfeeding:
- No support, consultants
 - No areas to express
- Having to express in a toilet was mentioned by many
- Judgement from the public, employers when breastfeeding

Lack of support

- Overall perceived lack of support emotionally and practically
 - Overall lack of accessibility to crucial information needed in early years
- Lack of quality support from the services available

Parental leave

- Another key theme was the inconsistency of parental leave
- All felt that maternity leave should be longer to be able to bond with the child and have less pressure to return to work, but also that it is paid so the financial stress is decreased

What does Early Years mean?

- Majority felt that Early Years is defined as the years leading up to school i.e. newborn to 5
- Most mentioned they wouldn't call it Early Years, rather their terminology was “babies and toddlers”
- Most did not include conception as a stage of Early Years
- Many felt that this stage is extremely important for a child's development, especially as every child is different
- Early Years perceived critical for a healthy, happy society

“Happy parent, happy baby.”

All felt that support is crucial and extremely important in Early Years

- All felt that **physical and emotional support is vital in the Early Years of a baby's life, both for the parent/carer and child**
- Many also mentioned that the support given to a mum early on is super crucial that it is sensitive, as many mums become too overwhelmed with the wrong/too much support/information
- However, the following experiences were mentioned to especially need support;
Mums enduring a C-section, parents with no local family/friends, premature birth, Post-natal depression, PTSD, anxiety, new parents and 2nd time parents, young mums, dads, working parents, breastfeeding mums
- Majority mentioned the importance of support for **being able to balance everything is crucial**; finance, childcare, mortgages, "grown up time", relationships, own mental health as well as baby's
- Many mentioned that it is better to have **early intervention** rather than trying to fix issues later on and to also have different support at different stages
- Many mentioned that **every child is different**, so every child may need a different type of support
- Some mums felt they couldn't emotionally be a "stay at home mum" and it was **more important for their mental health to be working**
- Many of the respondents who had children at a young age felt there was a **strong stigma and felt judged** by others around them, including professionals such as health visitors, therefore wished for more emotional support
- Respondents mentioned the **importance of support after having a 2nd child**; many felt unsupported and wished for better support

"If I go part time I can't afford childcare, tough balance."

"You're more likely to become isolated as a parent, feel trapped."

"My husband doesn't bath them, won't change his nappy. But the Government got in contact got additional hours for free, that really helped me, my daughter needs a lot of attention, I would've gone crazy without it."

"It's crucial but I didn't have it, you just got on with it."

We could provide the best start for our children so much better if...

Funding was provided to be flexible to help parents where they needed it to be. If before/after school help or free hours in a pre school. Help for short periods of childcare.

If we could give more support to parents with flexible childcare and accessible advice at all times (in a friendly atmosphere without judgements)

More support available - free childcare, availability of assistance/ support from professionals. Better understanding to all parents that support work is available. Early education for parent. School lunch, hot meals, structure outside of school hours
Free after school activity clubs, time off work to do homework - more quality family time

We extended hot school lunches to all schools on the island

Parent support as in meeting others and getting advice was readily available through an access point e.g. health visitor. all groups/nurseries etc to be listed on a website - up to date

More support for working parents and more flexibility in early years support and care

We could provide the best start for our children so much better if...

Better maternity pay
Support for families -
depending on their situation.
Someone to look at you

We had more help and support
from the government in early
years to do with playgroups and
nursery hours. Giving nursery
hours after the child turns 3
rather than school year

The States of Jersey will look at
whole family system support in
closer eye, more benefits for
support groups for parents, if not
charities in Jersey there wouldn't
be much support. Mindfulness at
nurseries/school for children
should be in all schools

The States can offer more
flexibility in choice of early year
childcare e.g. longer paid
maternity or earlier start of free
nursery

We had more financial support
and better support with childcare
options. Bring forward NEF hours
to 2 and extending social security
payments

Families were supported to stay
at home and raise children with
access to childcare not penalised
for doing so. Maternity benefits
increased for longer to allow
establishment of breastfeeding
bonding.

We could provide the best start for our children so much better if...

You supported large paid maternity, flexible working and support mental wellbeing of parents.

Outdoor/ creative play for under 6
A dedicated BR feeding counsellor at hospital

We had a centralised hub offering multi agency services for parents and children to access the support they need.
Communal spaces and audit the quality of provisions to ensure access for all.
Look at part time working arrangements.
Maternity leave - 12 weeks is not enough. More flexibility and options needed.

The States were to listen to parents wanting to return to work. Health visitor/ Dr to listen to parents. More supportive hubs. to not be penalised for returning to work i.e. not financially better off. Nursery spaces to be available and more affordable. To not feel judged when seeking help and advice without reporting to social services and give a family extra stress.

We had walk in centres for medical needs (free), more professional support throughout 0-5 (and beyond), flexible workplaces, more things for children in Jersey to do e.g. parks, play areas. Weekend playgroups/ more parent groups/ support/ classes/ courses etc

Services worked together and parents were supported in order to have a work life balance with their children

We made every effort to provide emotional support to parents within the first year of a child's life. We need to be committed financially to providing backing to educational establishments at every level. This must be a priority.

We could provide the best start for our children so much better if...

We can provide the best start for our children so much better if there is more emotional and financial help for parents. Also if nursery NEF was more widely available to younger ages too to give parents a break. free activities other than playgroups especially in winter eg sensory/ massage/ dance should be free as you have to pay for them currently

We had longer paid maternity leave and parental leave. Cheap rate groups, cheaper nurseries. more info with health visitor
Breastfeeding support and groups to help you when you struggle
Free milk for children

We had more free flexible nursery hours. Winter options for kids to go and spend their energy. More subsidised facilities for kids in winter

Flexibility
Info hub
Cheaper loans
Free milk
Free bus post C section op
More nurseries to lower unit cost

Paid maternity for the first year (full paid)
Equal paternity rights to leave and pay

We were made more aware of important information and help. More things were affordable to help us. free nursery from a younger age as my daughter loves nursery. More help and support for single parents. Free doctors for mums/ dads to help with mental health post baby

We could provide the best start for our children so much better if...

We have paid leave for at least 6 months so we can bond and mind/body recover. Drop in hub mon-fri 9-5 in town for all services. Cheaper after school options for 2nd child. Establishments have correct facilities, breastfeeding, changing rooms for dads

If we could have an all day mon-fri hub to drop in for emotional or physical support in rooms enabling 1-2-1 sessions. Standard longer time frame of pay so not so much pressure to return so early to your role. One to one breastfeeding weekly home visits

Parental rights (embedded in legislation) were drastically improved. Improve carers' support and recognition of the role carers play. Taxation system that reflects modern families and societal needs

Maternity pay men and women, breastfeeding/location consultant, paid leave

There was more support with funding for childcare/nurseries. We need more support with breastfeeding - both emotionally and places to breastfeed around town. More private funding for maternity leave.

We prioritise mum/parents well being and society recognises that children are our future and therefore make more funding available for qualified professionals to lead playgroups and ensure employers recognise the importance of bringing up children

There was more clarity on things on offer for kids at various stages of growth

Parents having the support, financial, emotional and practical, to make whatever choices are best for them. Clearer and more readily available information.

Happy mother is a happy child, make sure you are listening

We could provide the best start for our children so much better if...

If we had more job flexibility, joint maternity/paternity available for longer periods, being there for our children. Not feeling pressures financially because of tax, mortgages to have to rush back to work. If there were more groups available for mums, dads to help through all the stages, struggles with babies, toddlers how to manage difficulties etc

There was less pressure to choose between working and being at home to be able to cope financially in a situation to work part time to pay a mortgage and have support for school holidays

We could manage to have family support at early years. If the healthcare/midwife would help us apply for family visitors visas. Only HMO in Jersey. Also flexible working hours like online work, work from home or term time only

We as parents had more physical and mental support and had the right information to support our children and help them to grow

We are able to spend more time with our children but have the option of having some help

We provided a public service that accounts for all under 5's regardless of parents' circumstance

We maintain or even extend nursery provision for all 3 year olds. It improves their social skills, then language and development, giving them hot nutritious meals would also help

Everyone is able to get a license to employ staff off island, without 5 years residency. Services have shorter waiting lists and information on an app for everyone to access

There was a facility that enabled parents/carers to access current information to help shape our children's care. Socially, psychologically and emotionally

Conclusions

- Key themes throughout the research included:
 - Cost – childcare, working or not working, cost of living in Jersey
 - Breastfeeding – lack of help/support, lack of places to express or breastfeed, lack of understanding from employers
 - Lack of support – overall lack of support, emotional and practical
 - Parental leave – many really struggling as cannot afford or do not have enough time off
- Majority defined Early Years as the years leading up to school i.e. new-born to 5
- All respondents felt that support is vital in these early years, however most received minimal. Support mentioned:
 - Family and friends
 - Lack of accessible information
 - Lack of support for parent and child e.g. mental health, speech therapy
 - Overall lack of childcare opportunities such as playgroups, creches, babysitters
 - Many had negative experiences with Health Visitors in St Helier
 - Midwife support positive, however information/leaflet/pamphlet given was too overwhelming
 - Overall lack of breastfeeding support – teaching, help, checks, areas and understanding from employers
- Services mentioned included Midwives, Health Visitors, Brighter Futures, Jersey Childcare Trust and MESH, however perceived that these services were mainly targeted at troubled families and should be for all regardless of parental circumstance



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