

States of Jersey
States Assembly



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Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel



School Starting Age

Presented to the States on 2nd May 2017

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1. Chairman's Foreword

Rationale

As a trained Early Years Teacher by profession, the topic of School Starting Age has always been of interest to me. It remained so when I became a States Member as it seemed to be something that concerned many parents and professionals who spoke to me. We want the best for our children at all stages of life and never more so than during a transition from one stage to the next. The transition to formal schooling is arguably one of the most significant events of all during childhood. My key objective throughout this review was to keep in mind the needs of the Island's young children and to assess whether they were being well served by the Education Minister and his policies.

Review Process

The Panel, as always, attempted to be as thorough as possible in gathering evidence and this included visits to various Primary Schools on the Island. It became clear to us during these visits that teachers working with young children in Jersey schools demonstrate extraordinary dedication to their role. The amount of hard work and preparation that goes into every minute of every day that children are in school is quite staggering. I would like to thank all the teachers, head teachers, and other staff at the schools we visited and in the Education Department who have assisted with this review.

The Panel was fortunate to receive expert guidance from Professor Elizabeth Wood, who was appointed via a selection process which showed her to be extremely knowledgeable in the area. She has caused me to pause for thought at several stages during this review process and has challenged my thinking at a deep level on matters which I believed myself to already be very well informed about! This, to me, is what the scrutiny process is all about – having an open mind when gathering evidence, in order to reach balanced and objective conclusions in the best interests of the public. I am grateful to Professor Wood for the academic rigour which she brought to this review.

Findings

There are some key matters which I would like to draw attention to, one or two of which echo findings in previous reviews carried out by my Panel which I feel need to be considered more generally. These are:

- Parental Choice
- Communication
- Consulting teachers & encouraging professional judgement

Parental Choice

Although the title of the review is 'School Starting Age', it quickly became apparent to the Panel that the concerns about when children start school are not as simple as what *age* children start. It is about when the schooling provision becomes more *formal*.

Many parents actively want a more formal, academic approach from as early an age as three. Others aspire toward a more child-led experience with perhaps more free play and a teacher who provides learning targeted to the child's interests. It is clear our current system does not provide the options that parents need to make informed choices about their child's early schooling experiences. The catchment system is restrictive and only those who can afford to pay for private schools have a real choice for their child.

The Minister and his department have a difficult job in ensuring that available resources (school buildings, staff) are utilized in a way that is predictable and cost-effective to the taxpayer. The challenge now is to balance these requirements with the very pressing need to provide more choice to parents in when, where and how their children are educated, from their early years and beyond. In the same way that it has been suggested that one of the States' Primary Schools focuses on the French language, the Minister should consider diversifying in other areas such as offering a Montessori School.

Communication

Many of our advisor's observations and the Panel's recommendations centre around communication. This seems to be a problem time and time again with the States of Jersey generally. Well-meaning Ministers and staff within departments produce information which is printed onto leaflets or placed on a website for islanders to look up. However I believe that we must make efforts to ensure the information is given in different formats and made easy for the public to access. We live full and busy lives here on our little island and it is clear to me that Ministers should be going to where the public are, rather than expecting the public to come to them. And like it or not, the public are on social media, so that is one of the places where the information needs to go. There is progress being made in this area but more needs to be done. Information also needs to be given at much earlier stages, as parents make choices for their children often even before birth.

Consulting teachers & encouraging professional judgement

The Minister has already initiated a review into the Early Years provision in the island. This is an ideal opportunity to create something amazing for the young children of Jersey. As Professor Wood suggested within her advisor report, a 'designer version' of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum is something I strongly believe we should be aspiring to. We are not bound to follow the UK, and could be using all the knowledge and experience of professionals within the private and States sectors to create a Jersey Early Years Curriculum that is truly responsive to young children whatever age they start school. An Early Years Conference would provide 'thinking space' for professionals to take time away from their day-to-day duties and would be an opportunity for valuable cross-pollination of ideas and expertise. We should aim high. The Minister should strive to use the experience and knowledge of the profession and consult as widely as possible, and give teachers the trust and resources they need to give young children the best education possible.

Final Thanks

I would like to give some final thanks to my Panel and our Scrutiny Officer for their hard work, to all parents and other members of the public who contributed to the review in any way, and

most importantly to the children at the schools we visited for allowing us to spend time in their classrooms. It was an absolute pleasure observing you at work and play.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L.M.C. Doublet', written in a cursive style.

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet
Chairman
Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel.

2. Key Findings and Recommendations

Key Findings

1. Article 2 of the Education (Jersey) Law 1999 allows children to start school at the beginning of the term they turn five years old. The Minister is starting children in September when some have only just turned four years old. (Page 12)
2. No developed country on the UNESCO list of school starting ages requires children to begin school (formal education) at the age of four as is the practice in Jersey. (Page 14)
3. Some professionals believe that areas such as the home environment, socio-economic background and gender have as much or more impact on the achievement of children than being the youngest in the class. (Page 16)
4. Information from Article 2 of the Education Jersey Law 1999, relating to the term in which a child may start school, is not available on the Education Department web page. (Page 17)
5. Before their children start school, parents do not have enough information about the type of learning children will engage with. (Page 23)
6. Teachers in Jersey strive to provide education appropriate to each child's age and stage of development. (Page 25)
7. There is not complete consensus across the teaching profession as to what is best practice in the early years. It remains a subjective judgement amongst numerous parties including parents, teachers, policy makers and professionals in the field. (Page 27)
8. Children need individual provision at any age commensurate to their stage of development. The early years, in particular, require a specialised teaching approach. (Page 28)
9. Some parents want the choice of when to start their child in school and what type of schooling they receive. (Page 30)

Recommendations

1. The Minister for Education should provide a genuine option to the public for their children to start school in the term in which they turn five, including giving thought to extending the provision of high-quality nursery provision to cover any gaps. (Page 12)
2. The Minister for Education should consider evidence relating to the benefits and disadvantages of a later school starting age in the context of Jersey's culture and education system as part of the Early Years Review. (Page 13)
3. The Minister for Education should partner with other relevant Ministers to ensure that parents of all new-born children are provided with information that explains school catchment areas, school starting age, the type of education that is available to children and all other relevant information about the Jersey education system. (Page 18)
4. The Minister for Education should ensure that the Education website contains easy to navigate, up to date and correct information, providing parents with the information they need to make appropriate decisions for their child starting school. (Page 18)
5. The Minister for Education should ensure that all parents know that they are welcome in schools, not the other way around where parents have to seek contact under their own initiative. (Page 23)
6. The Minister for Education must allow Jersey schools and teachers the flexibility to approach each child as an individual and encourage the use of professional judgement in their teaching. (Page 25)
7. The Minister for Education should gather views from all those involved in early years in Jersey, perhaps via a conference or similar event where all professionals discuss and debate together and produce an agreed Jersey framework. (Page 27)
8. The Minister for Education should consider providing more variety as to the types of schooling available, as currently, only those who can afford to pay for private schools have a real choice relating to their child's education. (Page 31)
9. The Minister for Education should make provision for schools to take children when they are ready for school even if this takes the child outside their currently planned starting year, particularly if the child's birthday falls close to the cut-off date. (Page 31)

10. The Minister for Education should consider changes in legislation in order to facilitate changes in recommendation nine and ensure all children are required to attend school through to the end of their GCSE year. (Page 31)

3. Jersey School Starting Age

1. For a significant time, the Panel had been aware that Jersey, along with the United Kingdom, was amongst several countries with the lowest age for children starting school. The Panel Chairman has held a long standing interest and several people have discussed views with her calling for a different approach in legislation or at least in the application of current legislation.

‘...beginning on the first day of the school term in which the child’s fifth birthday falls’

2. The Education (Jersey) Law 1999 provides for the starting age within Article 2:

‘Article 2. Compulsory school age

- (1) *For the purposes of this Law, a child is of compulsory school age throughout the period beginning on the first day of the school term in which the child’s fifth birthday falls and ending on 30th June in the school year in which the child attains the age of 16 years, and the terms “below compulsory school age”, “upper limit of compulsory school age” and “over compulsory school age” shall be construed accordingly.*
 - (2) *For the purposes of this Article, the following periods in any school year are school terms –*
 - (a) *the period beginning on 1st September and ending on 31st December;*
 - (b) *the period beginning on 1st January and ending on 30th April; and*
 - (c) *the period beginning on 1st May and ending on 31st August.*
 - (3) *The States may by Regulations amend paragraphs (1) and (2) for the purpose of altering the period of compulsory school age’*
3. Jersey legislation means that Jersey children start school when they are four years old, at the beginning of the school term in which they turn five.

4. The Panel had two areas of concern:
 - That generally, the school starting age in Jersey may be too low.
 - More specifically that Jersey schools may not be ready for the youngest children. (Often summer born children, particularly those born in August, may be considered by some to be disadvantaged by being the youngest.)

5. The Panel engaged Doctor Elizabeth Wood, a professor at Sheffield University to assist with the gathering and interpretation of the evidence in this review. Her report is attached at Appendix 1.

6. The Panel noted that parents in Jersey are advised by the Education Department to start their children in schools in the **September** of the school year that the child turns five. In practical terms that means that children start in the reception class of school at the age of four years old, and in the case of summer born children, particularly those born during the summer holidays, some only a matter of days after their fourth birthday¹.

7. Despite the options contained within Article 2(1) of the Education (Jersey) Law 1999, that a child shall attend school from the first day of the school term in which the child's fifth birthday falls, no formal provision is extended to reserve a place for children beyond the autumn term, should the parent chose to start their child at school on their legal start date. This could be either for the Autumn Term in September at the start of the school year, in the Spring Term (January) or Summer Term (after Easter holidays).

The School Year		
Autumn Term	Spring Term	Summer Term
September to December	January to March	April to July

8. If parents want children to be schooled in, for example, the local parish school, or a school where siblings attend, failure to take up the offer of a place in the September

¹ A position noted in the Panel Advisor report appendix 1.

Only a very few people take up the option of starting later in the year.

may prevent the parent starting their child at that school in later terms due to all the places being filled². The Panel is aware that many of the primary schools fill up very quickly and some even have a waiting list. When this issue was discussed in the hearing with the Education Minister, the Chief Officer of Education stated:

“I think it is a fair point. If I am a parent and I want my child to start in my local nursery in January, and it is my right to do that, there is a tension in the system if we fill all those places and we get to January and that place is unavailable. As we have said, the numbers are very small, but that is perhaps something that we need to look at in terms of our admissions. I do not think parents ought to be penalised for exercising their right, so we are quite happy to look at that. The numbers are quite low ...”³

9. The Panel received several submissions which raised this as a concern and recognises that the Minister’s policy of starting all children in September is not aligned with the Law. The Minister informed the Panel that starting children in the September was “accepted practice”, rather than being within the Law:

“I think it is just an accepted practice that this has been embedded within the educational remit for quite some time, now. I think in terms of power we do not use any different power than the one that has already been exhibited.”

“The Education Department at the time were under a bit of pressure to make it more flexible, which is the current policy where the vast majority start in September, but parents still have the right to start their child, their boy or girl, in a term in which they are 5, and I think that is pretty rare. So it was a flexible approach.”⁴

² Information provided by the Education Department.

³ Public Hearing with Minister for Education 21st March 2016.

⁴ Public Hearing with Minister for Education 21st March 2016.

10. The Minister made it clear to the Panel that only a very few people take up the option of starting later in the year. He also accepted that this could be because there is little information published relating to that option⁵.
11. Following the public hearing with the Minister in March 2016, the Department provided information to the Panel clarifying the issues⁶. In the school year 2015/16, only one request to delay until the summer term was received by the Department, which was accommodated. However, if the Department were to start receiving requests to delay from a number of parents then it would need to review current procedures and look again at Article 15 (3) of the Education Law

15 Parental right to choose school

(1) The parent of a child aged below or of compulsory school age shall have the right to express a preference as to the provided school at which the parent wishes education to be provided for his or her child in the exercise of the Minister's functions.

(2) Subject to paragraph (3), the Minister shall comply with any preference expressed pursuant to paragraph (1).

(3) The Minister shall not be required to comply with a preference if to do so would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources

12. During the hearing in March 2016, the Minister stated that the information on the Department's website was to be reviewed to ensure it provided full details of the options available and the Chief Education officer stated:

"We do not actively go out and suggest it is a good idea but it is not hidden away. It is part of the information provided to parents that it is their right."⁷

⁵ Public Hearing with Minister for Education 21st March 2016

⁶ Email, Wed 23/03/2016 14:55

⁷ Public Hearing with Minister for Education 21st March 2016.

13. As at 13th April 2017, the Education Department website section on ‘applying for a school’ states:

“Primary school places.

Children start school in the September of the school year in which they have their 5th birthday (so they can experience three terms in reception).”

14. There was nothing on the website regarding the option within the Education Law to start in the term the child turns five.

15. As stated, according to Article 2 of the Education Law, all children must start school at the start of the term they turn five. The Panel advisor noted in her report⁸ that, in theory at least, parents still have the choice of the second and third entry points to reception. In practice, the Education Minister is doing something else by starting all children in the September.

16. The Panel is aware that in most cases parents appear content with children starting in the September and actually, the Minister is providing something extra for the Island’s children that he is not required to do in law, which in many cases provides significant benefits to the child and family.

Key Finding 1:

Article 2 of the Education (Jersey) Law 1999 allows children to start school at the beginning of the term they turn five years old. The Minister is starting children in September when some have only just turned four years old.

Recommendation 1;

The Minister for Education should provide a genuine option to the public for their children to start school in the term in which they turn five, including giving thought to extending the provision of high-quality nursery provision to cover any gaps.

The Minister is providing something extra for the Island’s children

⁸ Appendix 1.

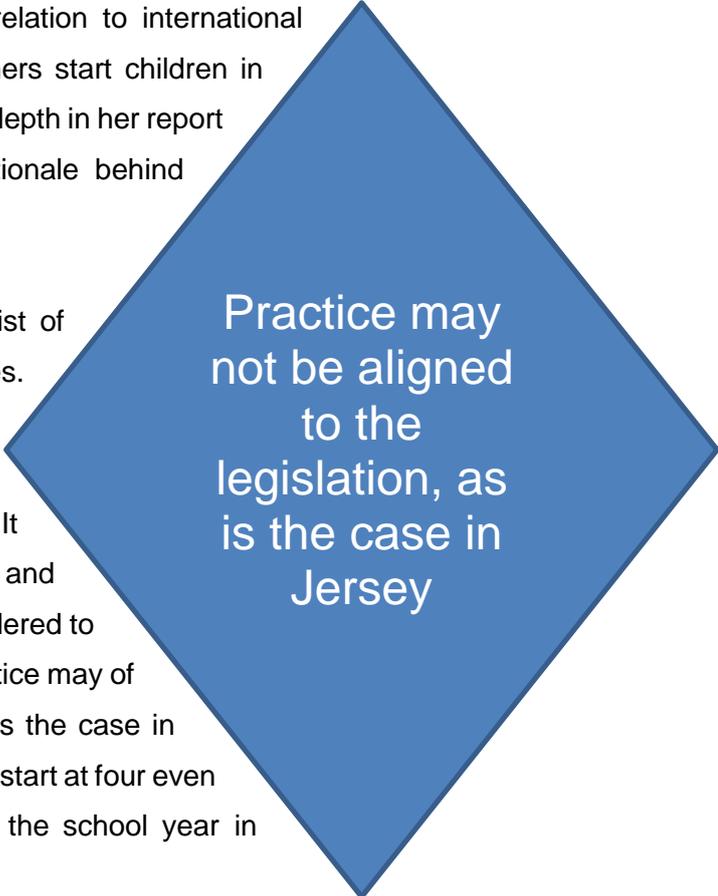
Recommendation 2:

The Minister for Education should consider evidence relating to the benefits and disadvantages of a later school starting age in the context of Jersey's culture and education system as part of the Early Years Review.

4. Age Compared to Other Places

17. The Panel was guided by the advisor in relation to international legislation and policies relating to when others start children in formal schooling. This is considered in more depth in her report (Appendix 1) where she discusses the rationale behind some variations.

18. The Panel notes data from the UNESCO list of school starting ages⁹ containing 51 countries. There are only 6 countries who start children at five years old and none listed start children at four years old. (See Appendix 2). It is noted that the list relates to legislation and Jersey legislation might reasonably be considered to start children in school at five years old. Practice may of course not be aligned to the legislation as is the case in Jersey where the vast majority of children will start at four even if they start in the second or third term of the school year in accordance with the Law.



Practice may not be aligned to the legislation, as is the case in Jersey

19. The advisor points out the contrast between Jersey and other countries such as Wales, Scotland, Finland and other Scandinavian countries, the global south and Eastern European countries who have different funding provisions for education, different levels of training for their teachers and differing language structures that require different learning approaches.

Key Finding 2:

No developed country on the UNESCO list of school starting ages requires children to begin school (formal education) at the age of four as is the practice in Jersey.

⁹ Data from UNESCO http://uis.unesco.org/indicator/edu-system-th_entry_age-level

5. Summer Born Children

20. Several submissions received by the Panel related to children born during the summer months, and particularly those born close to the cut-off point, August 31st. Parents of these children recognised that the child was almost a full year younger than others in their class. Some parents felt this caused the children to perform less well than others in their class during the first years of their school life and would fail to meet their potential due to being the youngest in the cohort.
21. The Panel received several submissions relating to this concern, many of which referred to information sourced from the internet¹⁰ where numerous documents¹¹ can be found which discuss and corroborate this argument. Some went further, arguing that the child may suffer from the impact of failing to meet his or her potential throughout their entire school life and as a result of poorer exam results, the problem is extended into their adult life.
22. The Panel found conflicting evidence about summer born children during fact finding visits to schools in Jersey. In one school, the teacher of the reception year told the Panel that the brightest child in that year was an August baby. The child struggling most was born in the September term.

Summer born children may fail to meet their potential.

23. Whilst teachers in all three schools recognised the concerns about summer born children as a legitimate problem for some, far more impact on ability was considered to be centred on other areas such as the home environment, socio-economic

¹⁰ Example: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/9843971/Summer-born-children-at-bottom-of-the-class-warn-experts-and-parents.html>

¹¹ Example: http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?q=Summer+born+children&hl=en&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholar&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi0jqag7v3SAhWHAMAKHVbaBEYQgQMIFzAA

background, gender etc. This has been corroborated by Professor Wood in her attached report.

24. Teachers advised the Panel that the children generally received the level of support and individual approach they needed. The Panel was also advised that there were times when that was not the case due to other pressures on the teachers.¹²

Key Finding 3

Some professionals believe that areas such as the home environment, socio-economic background and gender have as much or more impact on the achievement of children than being the youngest in the class.

¹² Information obtained during visits to schools in Jersey.

6. Available Information for Parents

25. In order to understand in more detail what the parents wanted in relation to the age their children started school, on Monday 25th January 2016, the Panel held a public workshop at St Paul's Centre. The invitation went out as widely as possible and was attended by about 30 people. A record of the points raised during discussions is contained in Appendix 3.
26. The meeting took the format of a workshop, with groups of people being provided with open questions to stimulate discussion in small groups and the results then being presented by one of the group to the entire meeting. The issues were then discussed further where necessary by the whole audience.
27. The Panel recognises that, as in most Scrutiny public meetings, many had attended because they were dissatisfied with the current legislation or policies in one form or another. Those who attended made valuable contributions to the evidence gathering process. Many points were raised, with a notable message being that, in many cases, people were not in possession of the facts of the provision in Jersey relating to school starting age.
28. It was of particular interest to the Panel that those who attended the workshop regularly made reference to information they had obtained from the internet, however, these same people complained of being unable to find the information they needed about school starting age in Jersey. These complaints were corroborated when the Panel sought information and found nothing on the website regarding the option within the Education Law to start in the term the child turns five.

Many were
dissatisfied
with current
legislation

Key Finding 4:

Information from Article 2 of the Education Jersey Law 1999, relating to the term in which a child may start school, is not available on the Education Department web page.

Recommendation 3:

The Minister for Education should partner with other relevant Ministers to ensure that parents of all new-born children are provided with information that explains school catchment areas, school starting age, the type of education that is available to children and all other relevant information about the Jersey education system.

Recommendation 4:

The Minister for Education should ensure that the Education web site contains easy to navigate, up to date and correct information, providing parents with the information they need to make appropriate decisions for their child starting school.

7. Starting School at a Later Age

29. The Panel had frequent references made by some who spoke to the Panel or sent in submissions, as to the large amount of information available through the internet about the benefits of children starting formal schooling at a later age, perhaps six or seven years old. Information available was from many and various sources and provided a range of arguments to support the later starting of children in schools. Some parents were consequently of the opinion that damage could be caused to children by starting school too early.

30. It is apparent to the Panel that, for some countries, a later starting age is appropriate. The Panel advisor discusses this in her report:

“For example, Finland was identified as having exemplary (play-based) provision until 7 but with children learning to read and write at a rapid pace between 7-9 years. The OECD evidence was cited, indicating that they ‘out-perform’ their English peers in Literacy and Numeracy.”¹³

31. The majority of the group who attended the public meeting believed that their children should be able to start later than provided for by the current Education Jersey Law. Some saw a later school starting age for everyone as the answer.

32. The Panel asked why starting later was considered to be the better option? People who spoke at a public meeting¹⁴ talked about children not being ready for school as they were too young and immature. (Appendix 3). They spoke about children being unable to cope with the structure of school, uniform and set times for various activities and about the school day being too long for young children to cope with. Overall, there was concern that, in the opinion of some of the parents, the child was not ready for what the school provided.

33. The Department advised the Panel that it has a very small number of requests for a later starting age each year from a cohort of about 1000 children entering the school

¹³ Appendix 1

¹⁴ Appendix 3

system. During the hearing of 21st March 2016, the Panel heard that there were only about three or four requests each year and after parents had visited schools, those requests were frequently withdrawn. Each application is considered by the Educational Psychology team on an individual basis and there are criteria that if met, allow some flexibility. This is usually due to illness, disability or special educational needs.

34. A question that emerged for the Panel was, if children do not start school until they are six or seven years old, what would they be doing in the meantime? Further, questions immediately arose about whether there are resources available for current pre-school providers to absorb the extra children or to supply what five and six year old children would need for appropriate play based learning. This review is not the correct vehicle for those particular discussions, which may be better placed within the forthcoming review of early years to be undertaken by the Minister for Education.

8. Deferral for a Year

35. Some of the submissions provided to the Panel discussed an option to defer children starting for a year as being the correct provision for their child. This would mean that a child would start in reception in the year (or term) that they turn six rather than at five years old as currently provided by the Law.

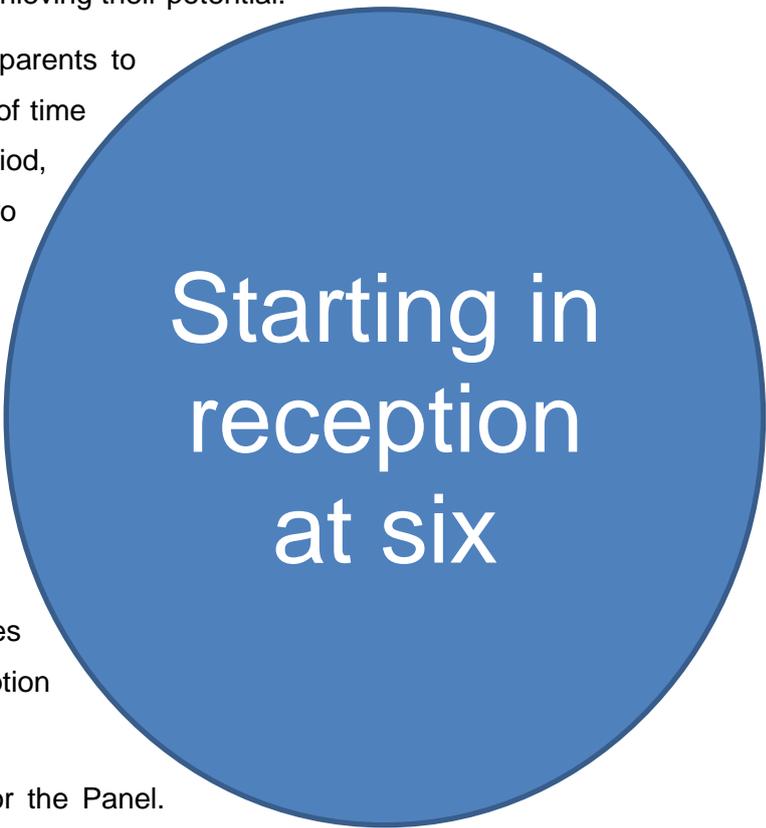
36. Some parents went to great lengths to explain to the Panel¹⁵ that some of those children born in August were considered too young and would always fail to meet their potential or be amongst the weaker of the cohort as a result. Allowing them to start a year later would mean they were the oldest and most mature in the cohort and would therefore have a greater chance of achieving their potential.

37. Another option would be to enable parents to keep a child for an additional period of time in reception. At the end of this period, should that period be a term or two terms, the child might re-join their peers in their chronological age group for the last term or two of year one. Or should that period be for a whole year, the child could remain 'a year behind'.

38. The Panel advisor deals with these issues in her report and includes comment on flexible provision of reception into year one.

39. Once again, this raised questions for the Panel.

How would older children in a younger cohort adjust to being outside the age groups of their classmates in areas such as sports, art and music competitions etc.? Not all, but very many children thrive on involvement in competitive sport such as netball, football etc. Some are involved with dance and other arts contained within the Eisteddfod etc. Many of these activities are age related. The Panel questions whether



Starting in
reception
at six

¹⁵ Evidence received both in written submissions and at public meetings.

children would be excluded from their peer group activities as they would be too old to meet the age group requirements.

40. Another observation made by the Panel was that if one parent starts a summer born child a year later, another child will then be the youngest in the classroom so the problem of one being weaker than the other is not resolved, simply passed from one child to the next.
41. There is also the matter of the age a child leaves school which needs to be considered. The Regulation making power in Article 2(3) of the Law (See paragraph 2) could be used to change the date of the finishing age as well as the starting age. Such changes are thought unlikely to have significant consequential law changes.¹⁶

¹⁶ Information provided by lawdraftsmen.

9. Parents Visiting Schools

42. It was of concern to the Panel that many parents spoken to¹⁷ appeared to have an expectation that children would experience the same schooling that the parents were provided with a generation ago.

43. One comment made at the public meeting and agreed by those in attendance was particularly of interest to the Panel:

*[Parents have] “no idea what their child will be doing in school”.*¹⁸

44. During open discussion periods at the public meeting, only a few parents spoken to had visited a school and none had spent a significant time observing the current provision. The Panel was informed, at that meeting that parents had not been given the opportunity to see the school in action. Parents had attended for short periods in the evening or after school and were unaware of the more developmentally appropriate and individualised approach aimed for in schools today. (appendix 3)

45. A head teacher who was at the meeting challenged that perceived position and the Minister has stated to the Panel on various occasions, that schools are happy to have parents in schools during the day and indeed encourages that to happen. It appears to the Panel that the message may not have resonated through to parents of future pupils. That was accepted by the particular head teacher.

Key Finding 5:

Before their children start school, parents do not have enough information about the type of learning children will engage with.

Recommendation 5:

The Minister for Education should ensure that all parents know that they are welcome in schools, not the other way around where parents have to seek contact under their own initiative.

¹⁷ At Public meetings and written submissions

¹⁸ Appendix 2.

10. Panel School Visits.

46. To establish information about the current provision for children of school starting age, the Panel visited three local primary schools of its choice¹⁹. This was one of the most useful parts of the evidence gathering process that the Panel undertook.

47. The Panel found that pre-school classrooms, reception classrooms and year 1 classrooms were often located in the same part of the school, sometimes with common outside play areas. In some cases, two or even all three of the classrooms were accessible to all children from the three classrooms due to connecting doors. This type of arrangement allowed children to direct their own learning where appropriate and for teachers to provide individual teaching for every child.

48. Teachers in all three schools recognised that starting as a young four year old was a legitimate problem for some children but considered that far more impact on ability came from other areas such as socio-economic background, gender etc. This has been corroborated by Professor Wood in her attached report. Teachers advised the Panel that the children generally received the level of support and individual approach they needed. The Panel was also advised that there were times when that was not the case due to other pressures on the teachers.

Children could direct their own learning where appropriate.

49. Teacher focus groups or surveys should be used to gain a more reliable and objective impression of what is happening across all schools in the Island.

¹⁹ St Peter, Plat Douet and Springfield Schools.

Individualised Approach

50. The need for children to be ready for school seemed to be a main concern for parents who wanted to delay school starting for their children. Much of the information that formed the basis of the parents' argument was based on numerous sources from the internet.²⁰ The teachers spoken to saw this differently. It was explained by staff in each of the schools visited by the Panel that it was a professional requirement to provide the appropriate learning experience for each individual child. In other words, the school needed to be ready for the child.

51. These visits provided clear evidence to the Panel that teachers spoken to generally met individual requirements of children, that there was flexibility in the approach and that in some schools, the option existed for children to move between the classes during the day.

Key Finding 6:

Teachers in Jersey strive to provide education appropriate to each child's age and stage of development.

Recommendation 6:

The Minister for Education must allow Jersey schools and teachers the flexibility to approach each child as an individual and encourage the use of professional judgement in their teaching.

²⁰ For example: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/9843971/Summer-born-children-at-bottom-of-the-class-warn-experts-and-parents.html> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21579484> <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/109784-birthdate-effects-a-review-of-the-literature-from-1990-on.pdf> http://www.ssatuk.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ECJ_p26-32_3-Education-The-Summer-born-effect-2.pdf <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/nov/01/birth-month-affects-results-well>

11. Early Years Standards

52. The issues around children being ready for school or schools being ready for children was examined and as the Panel advisor points out in her report, there are no national standards or definitions to assist in this area. It remains a subjective judgement from each of numerous parties including parents, teachers, policy makers and professionals in the field.

53. This quickly becomes a very complex area and it is very easy to become embroiled in academic arguments about Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) or Early Childhood Education (ECE) best practices.

54. The Panel notes that there are very many highly qualified professionals working in the area of early years with numerous papers published on the subject. Many have views which conflict with others, so that any one view point of early years education may be backed up by one or more of the many “experts” or professionals in the area.

55. The Panel advisor confirms these problems in her report when she discusses UK standards:

“...a current concern in England is that the assessment demands of the EYFS are driving practice in ways that are not consistent with notions of effective pedagogy in Early Childhood Education (Basford and Bath, 2014).”

Should
children be
ready for
school
or
school be
ready for
children?

56. Having examined quantities of available information, the Panel is not surprised that parents have concerns about these issues. Valid evidence can be readily found to back up all sides of this debate. It is a debate that often polarises professionals in the area. This subject of national, or indeed Island standards, of early years, could in itself, be a huge piece of work and is not for debate within this report.

Key Finding 7:

There is not complete consensus across the teaching profession as to what is best practice in the early years. It remains a subjective judgement amongst numerous parties including parents, teachers, policy makers and professionals in the field.

Recommendation 7:

The Minister for Education should gather views from all those involved in early years in Jersey, perhaps via a conference or similar event where all professionals discuss and debate together and produce an agreed Jersey framework.

12. Panel Considerations

57. The initial concerns of parents revolved around the age children started school. Having examined evidence and advice, the Panel now considers these concerns may centre more around the type of provision within the schools than it is about the age of starting. Rather than being worried about their children entering an educational setting at the age of four or five, the parents are concerned about how formal that education will be.

58. In practical terms, what would the difference be in the needs of a child at a given age whether they were in compulsory schooling or at the same point in their life, some form of extended pre-school provision? It would appear to the Panel, from the evidence it has obtained, the needs would be the same, no matter whether legislation referred to it as 'schooling' or 'pre-school' provision. The next child in that same environment may have a very different requirement. Children need stimulation appropriate to their development. Some need unstructured free play, others respond better to formal teaching, some learn best with teacher-led playful activities and many children of this age respond extremely well when the learning is child-led but built upon by a skilled adult practitioner. Many of course, need a mixture of all of these approaches.²¹

59. This can be illustrated as a continuum of approaches as seen below:²²



Key Finding 8:

Children need individual provision at any age commensurate to their stage of development. The early years in particular, require a specialised teaching approach.

²¹ Appendix 1.

²² The Panel recommends that anyone wishing to understand this concept reads the document this graphic was referenced from, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 'Learning, Playing and Interacting'.

13. Parental Choice

60. Parents spoken to by the Panel shared one very notable concern. They felt they had no choice. They had no choice over the matter of when their child started school and they had no choice over what type of schooling was received.

61. The Panel recognises that lack of choice for those parents is a very real issue.

62. In relation to when they start school, a child must be in school in the term they turn five. The Education Minister operates a policy, of starting all children in the September and that restricts choice for parents.

63. In relation to the type of schooling, some parents told the Panel that their four year old is not ready for school. The teaching profession states it provides for even the most immature four year old. The Panel notes that there are arguments for and against both positions.

**The Minister's
policy restricts
choice for
parents**

64. The Panel recognises that there are various other teaching models available, for example Montessori, Steiner or Reggio Emilia, none of which are available in Jersey. Elsewhere parents have choices to some extent or another. Although we have seen evidence that practitioners are using some elements of these models in their classrooms, Jersey has no such choices available.

65. There is another aspect to the issue of parental choice which is connected firmly to the Education (Jersey) Law 1999:

Article 11.

The Minister shall ensure that there is available to every child of compulsory school age full time education appropriate to the child's age, ability and aptitude.

Article 12.

(1) A parent of a child of compulsory school age shall ensure the child received full-time education appropriate to the child's age, ability and aptitude, and any special educational need the child may have, either by regular attendance at a school at which the child is a pupil or otherwise, in accordance with Article 13.

(2) Deals with deemed failure to attend

(3) Deals with failure to comply.

66. There is no clarity about how conflict of opinion between a parent and the Minister might be resolved. Any guidance which may be found in Article 15 (See Paragraph 11) only deals with where the child receives schooling, not age, ability or aptitude.

67. It is clear to the Panel that what many parents are asking for is the choice to start their child when they feel it is appropriate having regard for the age, ability and aptitude, rather than at an age set by legislation. (or in Jersey, by policy.)

Key Finding 9:

Some parents want the choice of when to start their child in school and what type of schooling they receive.

Recommendation 8:

The Minister for Education should consider providing more variety as to the types of schooling available, as currently, only those who can afford to pay for private schools have a real choice relating to their child's education.

Recommendation 9:

The Minister for Education should make provision for schools to take children when they are ready for school even if this takes the child outside their currently planned starting year, particularly if the child's birthday falls close to the cut-off date.

Recommendation 10:

The Minister for Education should consider changes in legislation in order to facilitate changes in recommendation nine and ensure all children are required to attend school through to the end of their GCSE year

Appendix 1: Report from Panel Advisor

EDUCATION AND HOME AFFAIRS SCRUTINY PANEL
SCHOOL STARTING AGE
STATES OF JERSEY

The terms of reference of the Scrutiny Panel are:

1. To establish if the legislation and policies relating to School Starting Age in Jersey are considered to meet the requirements of parents and children.
2. To compare legislation and policies relating to School Starting Age in Jersey with those of other jurisdictions both nationally and internationally.
3. To obtain evidence from the public and other stakeholders.
4. To hold public hearings with the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture and any others individuals or organisational representatives considered necessary.
5. To report to the States Assembly with the Panel's findings with any recommendations arising from the evidence.

The scrutiny process consisted of a range of meetings and public consultation events, as detailed in the scoping document. The evidence from these meetings is used in the report to represent the views and perspectives from members of the public, and other stakeholders. Implications are drawn for policy, provision and practice, on the understanding that a relatively low number of responses was made to the public consultation processes.

1. Review of the ECE field: policy change, transitions and school readiness

1.1. Policy directions

Early Childhood Education has been drawn into the policy spotlight in the last thirty years, justified by the claims that are being made internationally about the long-term benefits to children and to society of high quality preschool provision. The issue of school starting age (SSA) sits between the policy drivers for providing high quality pre-school education, supporting effective transitions to compulsory education (including continuity and progression), and ensuring 'school readiness'. Into this policy mix, we now see the effects of PISA and OECD reports on international comparisons of pupil performance at different stages of education. These influences have drawn attention to the need to prepare children for formal education, with the final year of pre-school (in Jersey the Reception year) often being turned towards these purposes.

Debates about the school starting age, and children's readiness for school, are well-established in research and in wider discourses. Popular concerns and fears include 'too much too soon', the 'push-down' effects of the primary school curriculum on the Nursery and Reception phase, and the long-term damage that children may sustain as a result of developmentally inappropriate provision. These concerns have always been more acute for summer born children, or those who are considered to be 'developmentally immature'. Debates about the SSA inevitably draw on emotive and often personal arguments, and this has been the case in the work of the Scrutiny Panel. So what does the research evidence indicate?

At the heart of debates around the age of starting school lie two contradictory positions. The first is the *statutory age* at which children are legally required to begin school. Currently in Jersey this is first day of the term in which they have their fifth birthday (which is consistent with policy in England). The second is that children should be able to start school when they are 'developmentally ready', which involves more arbitrary, personal and subjective judgments. The *actual age* at which children start school (for example in England) has changed through custom and practice in response to, for example, changing employment policies and trends for women, the need for extended provision, and the lack of coherent pre-

school provision that is of consistently high quality. However, it is worth reinforcing that the EYFS is designed for children from birth to five, and the Reception year (wherever this occurs) is part of pre-school provision.

What has changed since the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage is the move from three entry points to Reception (September, January and April) to a single entry point in September. This is driven by the desirability of children experiencing at least one full year in the Foundation Stage before transition to Year 1, and acknowledges that children's pre-school experiences are of varying duration and quality. In addition, employment policies for women, the high costs of childcare, and economic pressures all make a single entry point to Reception acceptable for many parents and caregivers. In theory, parents still have the choice of the second and third entry points to Reception, but this may not always be feasible in practice. Head teachers tend to want children to experience one full year in Reception because of the pressures they are under to demonstrate performance and achievement on children's transition to Year 1.

Concerns about the school starting age are particularly relevant to 'summer born' children – those born between 1st April and 31st August – because in practice, they are often expected to start school in September, when they may be 'young four year olds' in classes of older children. As a result, debates about the statutory age for starting school are inevitably bound with questions about the nature and quality of the provision in the transition year between non-statutory and statutory education, at whatever age this takes place (4-5, 5-6 or 6-7). There is consistent evidence in England that summer born children show differential achievement and progression in subsequent phases, in comparison with their older peers. However, as Bradbury (2014), argues in her analysis of assessment data in England, there are significant disparities in attainment between groups of children in terms of socio-economic status, ethnic group and gender. So it is worth keeping in mind that debates about SSA and school readiness have implications for equity and disadvantage across the population, and not only for summer born children.

Any changes to the statutory age for starting school will inevitably have knock-on effects into Primary and Secondary education, and will impact across systems, structures and processes. These are significant concerns in a small island state, with limited resources and capacity.

1.2 Defining 'readiness'

It is commonplace to say that just as children need to be ready for school, so should schools be ready for children, at whatever stage that transition takes place. However, there is no clear definition of 'school readiness', and this construct is often discussed in relation to two transition points – Nursery to Reception, and Reception to Year 1.

Readiness can be understood as a subjective or intuitive way of understanding the child's developmental stages in relation to their un/readiness for school. Or it can be seen as a set of measures that are used to indicate school readiness. The Ofsted report *Are you ready? Good practice in school readiness* acknowledges that

the precise characteristics of school readiness and the age of the child to which it applies are interpreted variously by the providers we visited. There is no nationally agreed definition' (2014, p.6).

Similarly the report *State of the Nation 2015: Social Mobility and Child Poverty in Great Britain* (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission) claims that

The lack of a common-sense, clear, shared understanding of what constitutes school readiness between parents, public health officials (health visitors), local authorities, schools and early education providers is a wasted opportunity (2015, p.16).

There are also confusions about what the different constructs of 'readiness' encompass. For example, readiness for Reception may involve skills of independence in self-management, getting along with others, leaving a parent or caregiver. In Year 1, readiness for schooling implies readiness for particular ways of learning – more formal and teacher-led activities, which involves specific tasks and less time for play and self-directed activities. Both transitions imply that children must become or be made 'ready' for the requirements and expectations of the settings. The influence of policy frameworks is critical in this regard: a current concern in England is that the assessment demands of the EYFS are driving practice in ways that are not consistent with notions of effective pedagogy in ECE (Basford and Bath, 2014).

Currently, children's performance on the seventeen learning goals in the EYFS is used as a measure of school readiness. Children are expected to achieve a 'good level of development' (GLD) as an indicator of their readiness. The EYFS profile inevitably prioritises certain learner characteristics and attainment that can be recognized by teachers, assessed as 'emerging', 'expected' and 'exceeding', and then quantified into a numerical measure or 'score'. The implications for summer born children may be that some are unable to demonstrate a GLD, where they are considered to be developmentally immature, or may have emerging impairments (such as dyslexia), or are simply 'not ready' for Year 1.

Other indicators of school readiness include milestones of 'normal' or 'typical' development, such as those proposed in child development theory. However, what is 'developmentally appropriate' may have wide interpretations according to the variations in children's capabilities, identities, prior experiences and dispositions, and the home learning environment. In addition, there are dimensions of diversity (age, gender, social class, ethnicity, religious affiliations, language) that will influence how the concept 'developmentally appropriate' is understood. These considerations are consistent with the work of Brown (2010) who contends that 'readiness' is multi-dimensional, and includes

the skills of the child, family and environmental factors, behavioral and cognitive aspects of a child's development, the child's adaptation to the classroom, and the characteristics of the educational and community systems available to the child and family (p.183).

In a recent report '*Improving school readiness: creating a better start for London*' (2015, Public Health England), four interrelated areas of readiness were identified:

- Ready families
- Ready schools
- Ready services
- Ready children

Priorities for investment were highlighted in each of these areas, with pre-school education playing a significant role in bringing together the potential benefits of investment in 'school readiness'. Three specific foci were identified to improve provision:

1. systems development
2. structural development
3. process development (including: adoption of more responsive and nurturing staff-child relationships; work towards an equal balance of child- and adult-initiated activity).

It is worth keeping in mind these three foci when considering the appeal of international comparisons.

1.3 International comparisons- some cautionary notes

The international research and policies around school starting age raise a number of considerations that are relevant to Jersey (Halpern, 2013; Peters, 2010). Although there are international variations in the statutory age of starting school, the reasons for this are situated in policy histories and trajectories. In countries where the age of starting school is 6-7 years, the rationale is often affordability of the number of years children spend in Primary and Secondary education (e.g. in the Global South and some Eastern European countries).

The Scandinavian countries are often seen as providing 'best practice' in this area, with a school starting age of 6-7 years. However, these countries share similar features:

- Policies embed equity goals into education provision and funding.
- There is high quality pre-school education, and this supports the transition to primary education.
- Teachers are trained to M level, and it is the norm that qualified teachers work in state-funded pre-schools.

In Finland (often lauded for exemplary ECE practice), provision is based on strong social democratic principles, with high taxation funding generous parental leave and maternity benefit, high quality pre-school provision led by teachers who are qualified to Masters level, and a national ethos in which ECE is valued in terms of education and care.

In contrast, Jersey is a small island state, without access to such resources and with a different history and policy trajectory. As is the case in many other countries, the 'mixed economy' of private, voluntary and maintained provision has resulted in significant variations in quality, access and availability of ECE. It is sometimes the case that entry to a Reception setting (age 4-5) in a Primary school is preferable to low or mediocre quality pre-school provision, particularly for children in low-income households, or in families where there is a poor home learning environment. Early entry for summer born children is, of course, dependent upon provision being appropriate for this age group.

1.4 Specific contextual factors in Jersey

Although Jersey has adopted the same school education policy framework as in England, there are key contextual differences and variations. For example, as the CEO stated in the Scrutiny Panel meeting on 21.4.16:

If you compare us to England, one of the issues we have had in our system is that almost none of our children have 2 years' experience in nursery, whereas in the U.K. (United Kingdom) a lot do. A lot of our children do not even have one year in nursery so, in terms of the context, you can see that in our schools in that nursery provision here needs to be expanded, which is why any opportunity we have we are putting nurseries into all of our state primary schools as and when the opportunities arise, so the context is slightly different.

Children in Jersey do not typically experience two years in a pre-school setting (as they do in England in the EYFS), and some may not experience one full year. This is because Jersey has mostly private ECE providers, so the plans to extend maintained provision in settings attached to existing Primary schools is timely.

It is worth noting that many of the parents who responded to this scrutiny associated 'starting school' with their child's entry into Reception, rather than continuing their pre-school education. This is understandable given that parents are bringing their children onto a school site, often with the requirement to wear school uniform, and with the structures and routines of a school day, which may be familiar from their own childhoods. Parents may not always be well-informed about the aims and purposes of the EYFS, its espousal of mixed pedagogical approaches (child-initiated and adult-led), and of play. The concerns expressed about summer born children centred on entry to Reception, with the potential for knock-on (negative) effects in Year 1, and in subsequent years. It may be advisable to consider how parents can be better informed about the characteristics of effective practice in the EYFS, the value of play, how children are prepared for the transition to Year 1, and the role that parents and families can play in supporting their children's education.

In Jersey, parents currently have the choice to delay their child's entry to Reception either to January or April. However, there is some confusion as to whether this is a choice in theory rather than in practice, and this was reflected in the discussion in the Scrutiny Panel meeting (21.4 16) regarding the allocation of places, and the availability of places across two or three entry points. It seems that there is work to be done on informing and reassuring parents a) that they have this choice and b) that a place will be open for their child in the school of their choice in Term 2 or 3.

2. Public Meetings and School visits 25.1.16 – 26.1.16

2.1 Public Meeting

The Scrutiny Panel members held a public meeting in St Helier from 7.30-9pm, which was attended by parents, teachers and related professionals. A set of questions was posed to the participants, and elicited a range of responses, with evidence of some strongly held opinions and fears amongst parents of inappropriate provision for summer-born children. The responses have been recorded in a separate document. Key issues that arose were:

- the lack of useful communication and information between parents/families and the school

- the need for flexibility and parental choices to suit each child (case by case)
- summer born children (April-August) would be disadvantaged if the provision does not meet their needs, and this would have lasting effects into later years
- summer born children would be damaged, and this would have lasting effects into later years

Some of the parents attending were well-informed about potential problems for summer-born children, and drew on selected research and international comparisons to justify their opinions and concerns. However, there was partial use of specific research (e.g. on brain development), and some misunderstandings of widely reported differences in school starting age, and children's outcomes at age 7. For example, Finland was identified as having exemplary (play-based) provision until age 7, but with children learning to read and write at a rapid pace between 7-9 years. The OECD evidence was cited, indicating that they 'out-perform' their English peers in Literacy and Numeracy. These claims need to be understood in the Finnish context, specifically

- Consistently high quality provision, with EC teachers educated to M level
- High social investment in education in order to achieve equity goals that are embedded in the Finnish constitution
- A phonetically regular language that is much easier to learn (oracy, reading and writing) than English

Some parents' concerns about summer-born children being disadvantaged and/or damaged were also informed by statistical evidence and popular media reports. However, no concerns were expressed about placing a summer-born child in day care from infancy, in spite of the research that identifies potentially harmful effects of long day care on children under three years old, especially where the provision is not led by practitioners with sufficiently good qualifications to ensure quality.

Similarly, the parents who were most concerned about the potential damage to their children as a result of early entry to Reception did not seem to know the level of qualifications required of teachers in the maintained system (where QTS is required in EYFS), and in the private sector (where QTS is not required in EYFS). Age is being used as an indicator of 'readiness',

but there are wide variations in children's development at age 4-5 years, which means that readiness can be constructed in different ways. 'Readiness' was being used as a global construct, with no acknowledgement that variations may lie in different areas of development – biological, social, cognitive, emotional, as well as dispositions towards learning, problem-solving, taking risks, developing relationships.

This meeting confirmed that there are many misconceptions and understandable fears circulating around the issues of the school starting age, particularly as it applies to summer-born children. These fears and misconceptions may indicate a lack of knowledge and understanding of the EYFS, and how schools work with this framework to support **all** children in the transition into Reception, and then into Year 1.

Feedback from parents at Springfield Primary School identified concerns that were generally rooted in their own experiences, and related to:

- Children having different rates of development and levels of maturity.
- Children should start when they are 'ready' and not according to their age.
- SSA is right for most children
- SSA is inappropriate.
- It's up to parents to decide.
- Some children need specific support tailored to their needs.
- 'Huge leap' from Reception to Year 1
- Unrealistic objectives in Year 1
- Age-appropriate objectives and individually appropriate objectives.
- Too challenging for some children, not challenging enough for others (this was not always related to summer born children).
- Nursery may not be challenging enough – some children need more challenge.

2.2 School visits

We saw a range of provision for children in Reception/Foundation 2 and Key Stage 1 classes. We had time to visit three schools and to discuss provision and practice with the head teachers. Short conversations were held with some of the class teachers, but there was no time for systematic questions or discussion of their opinions of the school starting age in Jersey.

In each of the three schools we visited, there was appropriate provision for 4-5 year old children under the leadership of qualified teachers. Common features included outdoor provision with plenty of space for children to develop their gross-motor and loco-motor skills. The outdoor areas contained appropriate resources and facilities, and children could move freely between indoor and outdoor provision. The Reception children were also able to mix with Year 1 children in outdoor, and indoor open-plan spaces. It was clear that in each of the schools visited, care is being taken to ensure that there is flexibility in the provision, with a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activities, including freely chosen play. This was evident in the resources available, the arrangement of space and the activities in which children and adults were engaged. This flexibility and mix of pedagogical approaches are consistent with the EYFS recommendations, and reflect current research on good practice for 4-5+ year old children (Broadhead, Wood and Howard, 2010).

Where schools did not have an on-site nursery, children enter Reception from a wide range of providers, and with varied experiences (duration of attendance, quality, 'readiness' for Reception). The schools are equipped to deal with these variations through their flexible provision. The teachers we talked to indicated that many summer-born children cope well with the transition and the expectations in Reception, and some are amongst the most capable in the year group. Again, the influence of prior experiences in pre-school settings, and of the home learning environment, are key to children's adaptability and resilience.

The EYFS can be interpreted to mean that the transition to more formal activities should take place during the Reception/Foundation 2 year, to ensure readiness for Year 1. (In this context 'more formal' means more activities that are teacher-led, with defined learning outcomes, fewer choices for children in how those outcomes are achieved, and less time for play and

child-initiated activities). However, this was not evident in the three schools we visited, and the teachers talked about sustaining EYFS approaches into the first term of Year 1 to ensure continuity and progression. It is worth considering how these approaches can be disseminated to demonstrate to EYFS and Key Stage 1 teachers how EYFS practices can be stretched into Year 1, with appropriate provision for progression and continuity.

One head teacher (who also attended the Public Meeting) commented that more information could be given to parents to ensure that they are fully informed of the nature of the provision available, the ethos of the school, and how parents can help to prepare their children for transition to Reception, and to Year 1. The three head teachers that we met all indicated their close involvement in the development of the Foundation Stage in their schools, and their awareness of providing good transitions into both Reception and Year 1.

2.3 Scrutiny Panel 21.4.16

The evidence from the Scrutiny Panel was transcribed, with details of the attending Panel members and witnesses. The PEP set out the conditions under which requests are considered for parents to hold back a child for a year:

That is, I suppose, in more general terms. In terms of a request where parents consider either a delayed start or keeping children back a year, we get very few requests each year; I would say probably 3 or 4. It is very rare to get one specifically where parents are asking for a child to be kept back a year because they are a summer birthday. In almost every case, apart from one in the last 3 years, I would say, it is because there are additional and complicating factors typically linked to S.E.N. (Special Educational Needs) or health needs, or something like that. (Principal Educational Psychologist, Scrutiny Panel 21.4.16)

On the basis of this small number of requests it may be argued that the legislation and policies relating to School Starting Age in Jersey can be considered to meet the requirements of parents and children. The PEP expressed his understanding of the fears and anxieties that parents have, and outlined the strategies to allay these:

So if it is just a request to keep a child back on the basis of a summer birthday I am not insensitive to the fact that sometimes starting school is a very emotional time for the child and parents. Essentially my first response about it is to: "Go and visit the school where you are planning to place your child and, if you like, seek some reassurance and confidence that the school can provide for your child's needs in the first instance." In almost every single circumstance that is a pretty effective response and parents go: "Yes, I kind of get it. I think this can work. It will be fine." There is a degree of reassurance around starting school at any given time in terms of parents; they want to know their kids are going to be safe and are going to thrive. The best way to get that is to go and visit the school your child is going to be placed in. (Principal Educational Psychologist, Scrutiny Panel 21.4.16)

As the PEP went on to explain, there are some clear criteria around when the policy might be applied on keeping children back a chronological year:

Being a summer birthday is not a criteria but it is very usual I get that question asked of me. So then it is a question of sitting down with parents, looking through the policy, working out which conditions might or might not apply, and seeing if there is a case to be answered because, if there is not, there is probably not a lot of point in you going through the process. People can choose to appeal as they feel appropriate. But if there is a case to be answered it is about involving the right professionals, which is the school, often someone from the educational psychology team, well, always someone from the educational psychology team.

Decisions about whether to hold a child back a year are made collectively with parents, key individuals and the school concerned. The CEO considered the strategy to be appropriate because:

It is right that we do not take these decisions lightly because we do need to guard against parents who just want their child to be the oldest not the youngest in a class and I think there is a bit of that here. We also need to make sure that when children get to the age of 16 they cannot leave school without having sat G.C.S.E.s. There are

a whole range of issues around this, so I think it is right that we need to be careful in making those decisions.

3. Readiness and transitions

3.1 Readiness for school

The four areas of readiness identified in *'Improving school readiness: creating a better start for London'* (2015, Public Health England), are useful for considering the development of policy, practice and provision in Jersey.

Ready families

Ready schools

Ready services

Ready children

These four areas of readiness could also be related to the three specific foci to improve provision: systems development, structural development and process development. In relation to ECE policy in Jersey, it may be useful to incorporate pre-school and ECE provision in Primary schools across the 3-6/7 age range. In relation to systems development, the Minister outlined in the Public Hearing the aspiration to attach a Nursery to those Primary schools that do not currently have one, in order to improve continuity and transitions. This may go some way towards allaying the concerns of parents, and improving transitions from Nursery to Reception, as well as from Reception to Year 1. However, systems development needs to be aligned with structural and process development to ensure consistency of good practice in transitions. The report on the Blackpool Transition Project (Bryce-Clegg, 2010) incorporates similar recommendations.

3.2 Transitions

In the three schools we visited, much thought had gone into structural and process development, specifically providing good transitions between Nursery and Reception classes, and between Reception and Year 1. Although the aspiration is always towards 'smooth' or seamless transitions, some changes are inevitable. This is not entirely inappropriate in that

children can be challenged and stretched by changes, and can learn resilience and adaptation. However, if transitions are too abrupt, (e.g. the transition from informal play-based approaches to formal adult-led activities) then children may experience stress and distress. This in turn can lead to emotional and behavioural difficulties that may impede learning and development.

An implication for policy and practice in Jersey is to consider best practice in achieving good transitions, taking into account the need for continuity and progression in curriculum and pedagogical approaches. Sustaining predominantly play-based approaches is not always appropriate for those children who are ready for challenge and extension. There is, however, substantial international research evidence that supports integrated pedagogical approaches, which includes a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activities (Wood, 2010a,b; 2014). The latter may incorporate freely-chosen play, creative arts, as well as more 'formal' freely-chosen activities that reflect children's interests and working theories. These approaches are appropriate in Key Stage 1 (and beyond) as long as attention is given to how play progresses, the value of projects and self- or group-initiated activities, and the importance of continuing to nurture key learning dispositions such as curiosity, experimentation, problem-solving, meta-cognitive capabilities, playfulness and a sense of wonder. Continuous provision for learning indoors and outdoors is also considered to be good practice, and for children to have access to other learning environments in their local communities (such as Forest Schools, museums and natural environments).

4. Implications for the States of Jersey

There are implications arising from the work of the Scrutiny Panel. Each of these involves considerations of systems development, structural development and process development. These implications are presented in the form of three scenarios

4.1 Three scenarios

Scenario 1: Maintain the status quo

The evidence gathered by the Scrutiny Panel suggests that this option is pragmatic. However, there needs to be a shared understanding of what 'good practice' means in Nursery and

Reception classes, and how transitions to Reception and Year 1 can be achieved as smoothly as possible. This does not mean failing to stretch and challenge children to extend their love of learning, and sustain their motivation to learn. Rather it means attending to continuity of provision, and building progression in learning. This is best achieved through integrated pedagogical approaches, with a balance of child-initiated activities, freely chosen play, and adult-led activities.

Parents need better information as to how children are prepared for the transition to Reception, and from Reception to Year 1. 'Readiness' is typically seen as located in the child (development, maturity, dispositions), as well as in the setting. From this child-centred perspective, some parents perceived schools as not being ready, or appropriate for their child, even on transition into Reception. However, readiness for the next stage (Reception or Year 1) is also constructed through the kinds of tasks and experiences that children enjoy, and through carefully structured approaches to progression and continuity, with appropriate stretch and new challenges.

It is worth noting that research on transitions that incorporates children's perspectives indicates that they enjoy challenge through teacher-directed and child-initiated activities, they value having time to choose, and they develop stronger peer relationships and affiliations. Areas that cause some problems include structured playtime (especially when spaces are shared with older children), lunch-time play, lack of appropriate outdoor spaces, learning the rules and related consequences of the new setting, and leaving/making friendships. In this regard, teachers need to attend to structural and process development, specifically the

- Physical, social and emotional contexts for learning, indoors and outdoors.
- Curricula and pedagogical approaches
- Ethos and relationships

Scenario 2: Enable parents to 'hold back' a child for an additional period of time in Reception.

Parents of summer-born children may not be fully aware of the possible effects of 'holding back' their children for part or all of a year, so that they either miss out part of the Reception year, or enter Reception a year late. They may be between a rock and a hard place in terms of their concerns about attending to their child's developmental readiness/maturity, and then finding that their child lags behind his/her peers on entry to Year 1, or does not benefit from developing social relationships with peers of a similar age. The knock-on effects to later stages of schooling would also need to be considered, unless there are strong reasons why this is the best option (for example, for children with defined educational needs).

There is already flexibility for parents to choose from three entry points to Reception, with the proviso that they understand Reception as an extension of pre-school provision and not as 'starting school'. It is worth considering whether some flexibility could be built in for children to make the transition to Year 1 at different points, perhaps with a few additional weeks in Reception to settle back into school and consolidate the progress made before the summer vacation. This may allay the fears of parents regarding summer-born children. However, the same caveats apply regarding children's peer group affiliations and social relationships, as research indicates that these are critical to successful transitions.

Scenario 3: Change to SSA to age 6 or 7

This option is more challenging given that Jersey has chosen to adopt many of the systems, structures and processes in England for the EYFS and Primary education. This option would require systems development, structural development and process development. Changing the SSA would mean uncoupling policy and practice from the EYFS and Key Stage 1, and aligning the Jersey system with different assessment points, and curriculum and pedagogical approaches. There could be benefits in starting to have these conversations. As the CEO stated in the Scrutiny Panel (21.4.16)

The difficulty we have got and the reason why we have not engaged in that debate at the moment is simply the capacity within the department. We are dealing with, as you know, a lot of big issues but sooner rather than later I think we need to have a grown-up, intelligent, informed conversation about what is best for children's learning and social development at certain ages and introduce that into our own curriculum. I think that would be a really interesting discussion and one we need to get right, because it

is very important. We know the impact it has on later attainment. I think rather than get into discussions about which date in the year children should start school I think we should get into at which stage of development we need children to have certain experiences.

In this regard, it may be useful to look at recent developments in 'near neighbours' other than England. Wales has extended the Foundation Phase to age seven, thus aspiring to a seamless transition from age 3-7. In Scotland primary education begins at age 6, and Northern Ireland remains consistent with policy in England. In Ireland children start school at age 6, and the government is currently paying attention to developing play-based approaches through their ECE framework - Aistear.

A key implication for each of these scenarios is ensuring that parents and caregivers in Jersey have the knowledge and confidence to make a decision that is (in the parents' view) right for their child. Such decisions may also be informed by the advice of experts, as indicated by the Principal Educational Psychologist in the Scrutiny Panel 21.4.16. Good quality nursery provision would need to be more widely available to support children's progression into Reception. Primary schools would need to be organized flexibly to accommodate one, two or three entry points per year on children's entry to Reception.

5. Recommendations

1. There is considerable work to do with parents to ensure that they are fully informed about their options regarding a child's entry to Reception class. It is not surprising that parents reach for popular media reports and scares about the negative effects of early school entry. School seems to be unknown territory for some parents, and some of the assumptions that were being made by some parents seemed to be based more on their own (not entirely positive) memories and experiences of schooling from their own childhoods.
2. Parents' fears and concerns need to be identified and addressed through government and school websites, meetings with teachers regarding transition

practices, information about their children's experiences, parents' forums, and about what parents can do at home to support their children's learning and develop their confidence. These measures would go some way towards two aspirations identified by the Scrutiny Panel - improving *capacity* and improving *quality*.

3. Ensure that parents are aware that they can choose for their child to enter Reception in September, January or April, with appropriate consultation with the head teacher and other professionals.
4. Consider how parents can be better informed about the characteristics of effective practice in the EYFS, the value of play, how children are prepared for the transitions to Reception and to Year 1, and the role that parents and families can play in supporting their children's education.
5. Consider what are the key aspects of 'best practice' for Jersey. Although Jersey has adopted much ECE policy from England, there are benefits to being a small island state in that Jersey might consider its own 'designer version' of the EYFS.
6. Consider how effective approaches to transition (as observed in the three schools we visited) can be disseminated to demonstrate to EYFS and Key Stage 1 teachers how EYFS practices can be stretched into Year 1, with appropriate provision for progression and continuity.

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University of Sheffield

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REGION	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
DENMARK	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	7.00
ESTONIA	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
FINLAND	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
FRANCE	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
GERMANY	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
GREECE	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
HUNGARY	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
ICELAND	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
IRELAND	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
ISRAEL	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
ITALY	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
JAPAN	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
LATVIA	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
LIECHTENSTEIN	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
LITHUANIA	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
LUXEMBOURG	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
MALTA	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

REGION	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
MONACO	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
MONTENEGRO	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
NETHERLANDS	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
NEW ZEALAND	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
NORWAY	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
POLAND	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
PORTUGAL	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
ROMANIA	7.00	7.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	7.00
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
SAN MARINO	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
SERBIA	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
SLOVAKIA	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
SLOVENIA	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
SPAIN	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
SWEDEN	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
SWITZERLAND	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00

REGION	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
UKRAINE	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00

Appendix 3: Public Meeting

Members of the public were requested to discuss, in groups, the following questions:

1. How do you know when your child is ready to start school?

Answers:

- Currently school starting age is 4/5
- Each child is unique- needs different developmental stages
- It is not the age, it is other issues
- Style of education
- Length of the day
- Is uniform needed
- Size of school
- Type of school
- Not enough info is given to parents to know what child should be ready for
- No idea what child will be doing in school
- Open day in June, but with dozens of other parents so no real insight into what takes place
- Question whether to send child to school or to home school.

2. What do you currently do to help your children prepare for starting school?

Answers:

- Send them to nursery
- Socialising
- Developing independent play
- Groups with other parents and children
- Teaching independence in the home
- You are not told, so how do you prepare them
- Some are not ready
- Less regimented starting

3. What do you think is the best age to start school?

- a. Is this to do with the age of the child or what they receive when they do start?

Answers:

- Check motor skills
 - Developmental norms for ages
 - Formal school to recommend age of 6yrs
 - Pre-school can be play based
 - Quantitative methods of measuring
 - Should be more about the child
4. Are children born in the summer months disadvantaged, being the youngest?
- a. Should there be separate rules for 'summer born children'?
 - b. If so, what sort of flexibility do you think would be appropriate?

Answers:

- Some summer born children maybe disadvantaged but so can any children who are not ready to start school.
 - Individual cases including background, environmental factors.
 - Maybe compulsory to attend pre-school at 5 instead
 - Play based learning until 6-7.
 - Not all summer born are disadvantaged
 - Flexibility case by case required
 - There always has to be a cut-off point
 - Not about being the youngest, about being ready.
5. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of a late start for the child?
- Provision for pre-school is important for the greater exposure and option for moving on to school.

Advantages

- Parents need individual choice
- More ready would benefit boys
- Socially
- Confidence
- Self esteem
- Communication
- Physically developed
- Attention
- Energy levels
- More emotionally ready
- Attention levels increase
- More ready to conform
- Brains developed more
- Harmful effects of stress if pushed too young.

- Sitting still
- Bigger batteries

Disadvantages

- Administrative issues of numbers in classrooms
- Feeling different to peers
- Possible bullying
- Not keeping friendship group
- Targets
- Depends on school
- Safeguarding
- Funding (Dispersed evenly)
- Not adapted to individual needs

6. Should the decision about when a child starts school rest with Parents?

Answers:

- Parents should be able to decide when the child starts school
- Should have proper dialogue with professionals as they do with doctors, medical treatment etc.
- More time to develop would mean less referrals/support once at school.

7. Should a late start mean missing a year in Reception?

Answers:

- No.
- Reception should be inclusive for all.
- Missing reception becomes a bigger change for the child.
- School should be tailored to suit individuals, not moving children to suit the rules.
- Children held back could then jump a year if able enough.

8. Should the 16 year old be required to stay on to take GCSEs?

Answers:

- The child is now an adult.
- Each child is different
- Peer pressure
- Is a GCSE a valid qualification?
- Parents involvement

- Leaving Certificate?
- Apprenticeships
- Could be dealt with by agreement
- Less problems if the child likes school

Other comments:

There should be parental choice even though it would have to be within a framework.

What of fee-paying Schools?

Systems should be designed to suit children, not the teachers.

Is this the same elsewhere?

Appendix 4: Panel Membership, Terms of Reference and Evidence Considered

The Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel Membership



Deputy L. M. C. Doublet, Chairman



Deputy J. M. Maçon,
Vice-Chairman



Deputy S. Y. Mezec



Deputy T.A. Vallois
(From 15th February 2016)

Expert advisor:

The Panel appointed Professor Elizabeth Wood who is a Professor of Education and Director for Research at the University of Sheffield. Professor Wood has a wealth of experience in education of young children having spent a large part of her professional life examining learning through play and the transition into more formal education.

Review Terms of Reference

1. To establish if the legislation and policies relating to School Starting Age in Jersey are considered to meet the requirements of parents and children.
2. To compare legislation and policies relating to School Starting Age in Jersey with those of other jurisdictions both nationally and internationally.
3. To obtain evidence from the public and other stakeholders.
4. To hold public hearings with the Minister for Education and any others individuals or organisational representatives considered necessary.
5. To report to the States Assembly with the Panel's findings with any recommendations arising from the evidence.

Briefing

The Panel received a briefing from officers of the Education Department which confirmed the current interpretation of the Education (Jersey) Law 1999 and current policy application.

Public Hearings

The Panel held a public hearing on 21st March 2016:

Attendees:

- Deputy R. Bryans, Minister for Education
- Mr J. Donovan, Chief Education Officer
- Mr J. Radcliff, Principal Educational Psychologist
- Mr K. Posner, Director of Policy and Planning, Education
- Mr C. Chipperfield, Director of Inclusion and Family Support, Education.

School Visits

On 25th January 2016, the Panel and its advisor, attended three schools:

- St Peters Primary
- Springfield Primary and
- Plat Duet Primary.

In each case a discussion was held with the head teacher followed by a tour of the early years section of the school.

Public Meeting

On 25th January 2016, the Panel held an open public meeting.

Evidence Considered

- Briefing from Department
- Public Hearing with Minister for Education 21st March 2016.
- Public Meeting on 25th January 2016 at St Pauls Centre.
- Visits to schools.
- Policy for Children Placed out of Chronological Year Group (delay or advancement)
- UNESCO list of school starting ages.
- Quarterly Hearing with Minister for Education 2nd March 2015.
- Childcare Bill (UK) June 2015.
- Submissions from members of the public
- Report from Panel advisor, Professor E. Wood.
- Learning, Playing & Interacting, published by DCSF