

NASUWT Submission – 11th March 2016

Thank you for inviting the NASUWT to comment on the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel's review of the school starting age.

The NASUWT is aware that concerns have been expressed in other jurisdictions that four- and five-year-old children are not yet ready to begin formal schooling. The Union also notes that such a policy is occasionally justified on the basis that some education systems regarded as high performing or fast improving do not admit children to school until they are six- or seven-years-old.

The NASUWT believes that such arguments overlook important considerations. In particular, it is often the case that education systems with relatively late school starting ages also have universal or near-universal uptake of early education provided in settings led by qualified graduate professionals. Almost all children in these systems therefore gain access to high quality learning experiences before they are six- or seven-years-old. It should also be recognised that many opponents of setting the school starting age at four or five years often fail to take into account the fact that schooling for pupils of this age does not have to be excessively formal in character. The NASUWT's view is that it is entirely possible to establish a curriculum for pupils for four- and five-year-olds within a school context that avoids an overly structured approach to teaching and that promotes a significant element of experiential and play-based learning.

While the extent to which the first years of schooling in Jersey have benefited from an appropriate curricular framework is a matter of legitimate debate, it is by no means evident that any issues about which the Panel may have concerns could not be addressed through curriculum reform rather than by amending the legal school starting age. The NASUWT is therefore clear that no credible case has been made to date for changing this age. However, the Union would welcome the opportunity to engage further with the Panel to learn more about its specific concerns and to provide any additional evidence that might support its further deliberations in this respect