Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds
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Pre 16 Education,
Schools and Early Learning Committee
Interim Report:

Compiled and designed by
The Graphics Unit,
CartoGraphics,
The National Assembly for Wales
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Introduction

The PRE 16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee is established under the Government of Wales Act 1998 and Standing Order 8. Its remit covers education, including the national curriculum and qualifications, to the age of 16; all aspects of schools administration and organisation; children’s issues generally, except that primary responsibility for social services lies with the Health and Social Services Committee. The Assembly Secretary who has responsibility for this area of work is Rosemary Butler A.M.

The Committee’s membership is:

- William Graham (Chair) Conservative South Wales East
- Lorraine Barrett Labour Cardiff South and Penarth
- Rosemary Butler (Assembly Secretary) Labour Newport West
- Pauline Jarman Plaid Cymru South Wales Central
- Gareth Jones Plaid Cymru Conwy
- Huw Lewis Labour Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney
- John Marek Labour Wrexham
- Jonathan Morgan Conservative South Wales Central
- Jenny Randerson Liberal Democrats Cardiff Central
- Owen John Thomas Plaid Cymru South Wales Central

Remit of Policy Review

- to consider the current pattern of educational provision for 3 year olds;
- to assess whether its expansion would be in the educational and developmental interests of such children;
- to assess the costs of such expansion which would place a new burden on local authorities and would need to be recognised in their funding;
- to assess the impact of expansion on the ability of playgroups and private providers to provide childcare for children below compulsory school age; and
- to make recommendations to the Assembly Secretary for Education and Children as to future policy.

Timetable

The Committee started by inviting a number of organisations to comment on what they wished to see being provided in Wales. In the course of considering the information provided, both oral and written, the Committee concluded that they wished to appoint an expert adviser to evaluate the information and advise the Committee in its consideration.
This interim report sets out the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations to date in relation to the issues that need to be addressed and the principles that should underpin early years provision in Wales. The Committee will consider further with its expert adviser the information provided and best practice that exists in Wales and other countries. It is intended that a report setting out the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations on the future pattern of provision in Wales will be concluded in the autumn.

Consultation

The Committee invited written submissions from 64 bodies and received 48 responses. The Consultation letter and full list of those invited to provide written submissions are at Annex B.

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The Committee heard oral submissions from:

- Qualification Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC)
- Estyn
- Dr Gill Harper Jones
- Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (MYM)
- Wales Pre-School Playgroup Association (WPPA)
- Children in Wales
- Professor Sonia Jackson
- Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
- Professor E.C. Melhuish

In total the Committee received some 170 pages of written submission and was referred to a number of learned books and articles on the subject. A bibliography of all references is at Annex E.

Summary of Consultation Responses

The full text of the written submissions received is at Annex C and the relevant Committee minutes recording the Committee’s consideration are to be found at Annex D.

The consultation identified the following areas of consensus:

- early learning opportunities for the very young are beneficial, the debate is over the nature and setting of those opportunities;
• early learning opportunities should be seen as a continuum in the overall learning process;
• play is a crucial component of a child’s early social, personal and intellectual development;
• the involvement of parents and carers at an early stage helped the very young in their development;
• the Welsh Affairs Committee in its report ‘Childcare in Wales’ published in June 1999 concluded that learning through play is the right approach for very young children.

**Current Level of Provision**

Provision for 3 year olds in maintained settings in Wales has been around 50 per cent for some time although there is considerable variation between Local Education Authorities. This compares to provision of around 33 per cent in England. Department of Education and Employment have set a target for increasing English provision to 66 per cent by 2003 and additional money is being made available to fund this expansion. No target for further expansion has been set for Wales.

Although 14 Local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships include private and voluntary settings in their plans, the majority only fund places in the private and voluntary sector where maintained sector places are not available. One partnership funds no provision for 3-year-olds. Provision is mainly in the maintained sector.

Some local authorities have expressed their wish to expand provision if additional funding is available; but early years partnership plans for 1999-2000 do not indicate significant plans for expansion overall.

**The Impact of Expansion on Childcare Providers**

There is a widespread view that the expansion to date of early years education has resulted in the closure of playgroups and private nursery facilities because expansion has taken place in maintained schools settings.

Against this background an independent review was commissioned by the National Assembly to look at the role of playgroups in providing childcare and early education. Its report has been received and is being considered.

The Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin is particularly concerned that if the current trend to increase maintained sector provision for 3 year olds continues it will jeopardise the growth in the number of Welsh language speakers in Wales. The Welsh Language Board sees the Cylchoedd Meithrin as the foundation to ensuring the survival of the Welsh Language and its current gains in increasing the number of people who can speak Welsh.
Issues

The issues that the Committee has to address in its consideration of the policy are:

- Pattern of Provision;
- Quality of Curriculum;
- Training implications;
- Equality of access;

Pattern of Provision

Amongst those who responded to the Committee’s invitation to submit their views there was an overwhelming consensus that supported the view that the benefits of effective early education outweighs the disadvantages. Those who supported this view did so based on the researched evidence that was available from a number of academic sources. These are listed in the bibliography at Annex E. The consensus further supported the view that the early education of three and four year olds must be part of a continuum with formal education at the age of 5 and could not be considered in isolation. In this respect it was felt that whatever final strategy for 3 to 5 year olds the Committee recommend it should be integrated with the Sure Start Programme and the National Childcare Strategy.

In doing so the respondents acknowledged that formal education through the National Curriculum does not start until the statutory school age of 5 as set out in the Education Act 1996. There were some views expressed that the statutory school age should be raised to at least 6. Those who argued this referred to international studies of attainment by children by the time they were 8. These found that children who started their formal education at 6 or even 7 had attained higher levels of learning by the time they were 8 than children who started formal education at 5.

The Committee agreed that the Assembly Secretary should ask Estyn to provide a report on the advantages and disadvantages of starting formal education at age 6 rather than age 5, the current statutory age. The Report should be completed in time to feed into the next review of the National Curriculum in Wales. This was a longer term issue and should not divert the Committee from its consideration of this issue.

Debate centred on the balance that should be achieved between play-orientated development and formal learning opportunities along with the settings that were most beneficial to children. Organisations in the voluntary sector expressed the view that the more formal learning environment provided by schools, particularly where adult/child ratios could be significantly higher than in more formal childcare settings, do not best serve the development needs of the very young. The evidence and representations from Local Government emphasised that there was a long tradition of early years provision in maintained settings, particularly in rural areas where there tended to be a lack of provision in other sectors.

The Committee discussed the information presented as to the most appropriate staffing levels for early year provision. There were currently different staffing levels set out in statute for childcare from that set out in guidance for education. The Committee concluded that the quality of the staff was of paramount importance and undertook to pay specific attention to the information coming from ACCAC on the accreditation of qualifications.
Quality of Curriculum

Both maintained and non-maintained settings funded publicly under early years development and childcare partnerships work towards a common standards benchmark set out in the ACCAC framework of ‘Desirable Learning Outcomes’ drawn up in 1996. The ‘Desirable Outcomes’ were widely welcomed on their introduction and have been reviewed by ACCAC against the background of the overall National Curriculum review. No changes are planned.

The ‘Desirable Outcomes’ guidance states that early years’ curriculum is about the child. It is concerned not only with the content but also with the context of the learning. The Committee were particularly persuaded by ACCAC’s advice that:

“it is especially appropriate to think of the curriculum for under fives as being experienced rather than delivered.” (ACCAC submission).

A view that was echoed in Children in Wales Early Years Unit’s submission:

“Young children learn through exploration, first hand experience, play and communication.”

In its guidance on ‘Desirable Outcomes’ ACCAC set out six areas of learning and experience and desirable outcomes within them. The six areas are:

- Language, Literacy and Communication Skills;
- Personal and Social Development;
- Mathematical Development;
- Knowledge and Understanding of the World;
- Physical Development;
- Creative Development.

The consensus of those who responded was that this framework is grounded in a set of principles and a value base, which reflect best early years’ practice. Estyn attributed the improvement in the quality of educational provision in a large extent to the provision of this guidance by ACCAC. The Committee accepted that the ‘Desirable Outcomes’ guidance should form the basis of learning development in any future early years’ provision.

All early years’ settings funded under early years’ partnership arrangements are inspected on a periodic basis by Estyn. Inspections of maintained settings are usually undertaken under section 10 of the Schools Inspection Act 1996. Inspections of non-maintained settings are undertaken under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act. At its meeting on 13 October the Committee endorsed arrangements for a partnership between Estyn and the proposed Care Commission for Wales on integrated welfare and education inspection arrangements for the under 8s.

Training

The Guidance on Local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships requires settings to be funded under partnership arrangements to have a qualified teacher, who is an early years’ specialist, to be involved in the setting in order to raise standards. This does not mean that the teacher has to
be employed by the setting. It means that the setting has to have access to such professional advice.

Funding is available under the Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) programme for training teachers in early years’ education. ACCAC are currently working with the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency in England to accredit new vocational qualifications under a draft framework for qualifications and training in the early years’ education, childcare and playwork sector. The Committee concluded that ACCAC should have regard to this report and the Committee’s views on the importance of ensuring high quality trained staff. It looked forward to receiving ACCAC’s report on accreditation in the autumn.

The Committee agreed that it should consider the outcome of the ACCAC’s accreditation work before considering the need for further action on this front.

Equality of Access

Social Inclusion

In order to ensure that all children who are at risk as a result of social exclusion can have equal access to early years’ services the Committee is of the view that the current practice of centrally funding provision for four year olds should, in principle, be extended to three year olds with no direct charge to parents. To impose charges on parents would mean taking into account personal circumstances and localised cost of provision, which would be costly and administratively expensive.

The Committee will consider further the most appropriate ‘entry point’ for three year olds, for example, on their third birthday or the term following their third birthday.

As this issue also impacts on childcare, it falls within the remit of the Assembly Secretary for Health and Social Services and therefore the Health and Social Services Committee. A copy of this report will be sent to the Chair of the Health and Social Services Committee and the Assembly Secretary for Health and Social Services.

Bilingual Provision

The Welsh Affairs Committee’s report ‘Childcare in Wales’ states that:

“Early years’ education is crucial to the future of the Welsh language.”

The Welsh Language Board in its submission to the Committee developed this point and argued strongly that early years’ services should include the opportunity for children in Wales to develop bilingualism.

The Committee wishes to continue to promote bilingual provision to the highest standards. It will consider how this can be ensured in the pattern of provision it finally decides upon, including the need to train staff to the appropriate level in both Welsh and English.
Children with Special Needs

The Committee will wish to consider how the needs of children with special needs can be met balanced with the need to ensure that all children have equal access to early years’ services. It is often the case that children with special needs are taken into education earlier than their peers. The Committee concluded that it would wish to consider this further with special needs advisers such as the members of the Welsh Advisory Group on Special Educational Needs.

Funding

The comparatively high level of provision for 3 year olds is the result of decisions taken by local authorities to use un-hypothecated revenue resources to fund the service. Any targeted increase in 3-year-old education would involve a new burden on local authorities, which would have to be provided for in the local government revenue settlement or some alternative funding mechanism which may be considered appropriate for the year (or years) in which change was to take place.

An initial estimate from the WLGA suggested that the staffing costs of extending half time nursery provision to all 3 year olds would be around £16m in a year. There may be capital expenditure implications too, but these have not been quantified.

The WLGA, WPPA and MYM, in their papers gave estimates of the costs of expanding provision. The Committee will have to determine its priorities in relation to the PRE 16 Education, Schools and Early Learning budget. The Expert Adviser will be asked to assess the financial implications of all proposed models of provision and any variations that the Committee recommends.

Building Partnerships

There are partnerships that need to be formed at all levels of providing early years’ education from the various providers to the parents and carers.

Local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships were set up on the principle of co-operation and working together with shared aims and objectives. Partnerships should represent all bodies (including representatives of parents’ organisations) with an interest in early education and childcare partnership plans should be endorsed by the Partnership as a whole. There is concern within the private and voluntary sector that the spirit of partnership has been lacking in the arrangements to date and that partnership plans have resulted in an expansion of the maintained sector early education provision. They fear that this will be the case with any expansion of 3-year-old provision through the partnership arrangements.

The Committee will look to its expert adviser to assist it with its consideration of ways in which a true partnership of providers can be achieved to service the best interests of the child. The private sector has many examples of good practice in involving parents and carers. These need to be built upon so that early years’ education in all settings has this partnership at its base. The role of parents as ‘first educator’ should be developed to support the service and the child.
Conclusion

The Committee having considered the written and oral submissions presented to it is conscious of the responsibility it bears to ensure that the agreed pattern of early years’ provision in Wales is appropriate for the needs of Welsh children in preparing them for their futures.

The Committee has agreed a set of principles which should underpin the future pattern of any expanded early years’ provision.

The principles are that early years' provision should:

- provide a sound foundation for future learning and achievement through an appropriate, developmental curriculum which is in harmony with the child’s particular needs and interests;
- achieve equal access of educational opportunity for all to reach their potential and take their full place in society;
- provide ‘wrap around care’ by developing partnerships between parents, families, childminders, nurseries, playgroups and schools in both the maintained and non maintained sectors; and
- ensure that the delivery of early education is guided and nurtured by suitably qualified early years educators who care as well as educate.

The Committee has been delighted that by the commitment shown by those who provide and advise on early years’ provision in Wales that has been reflected in the thorough and thoughtfully presented submissions. In order to assist the Committee in evaluating this wealth of information and in considering its recommendations it has concluded that an expert adviser should be appointed. A job specification for the expert adviser can be found at Annex A. The Committee is publishing its interim report and all the submissions at this time, in order to continue the stimulating debate that is taking place and to ensure that all those with an interest in this are kept informed of the Committee's work.
Summary of key conclusions

Expert Adviser

In order to assist the Committee in evaluating this wealth of information and in considering its recommendations it has concluded that an expert adviser should be appointed. A job specification for the expert adviser can be found at Annex A.

Curriculum/Learning Development

The Committee accepted that the ‘Desirable Outcomes’ guidance should form the basis of learning development in any future early years’ provision.

Training

The Committee agreed that it should consider the outcome of ACCAC’s accreditation work before considering the need for further action on this front.

Social Inclusion

In order to ensure that all children who are at risk as a result of social exclusion can have equal access to early years services, the Committee is of the view that, in principle, current practice of centrally funding provision for four year olds should be extended to three year olds with no direct charge to parents.

As this issue impacts on the childcare field, it falls within the remit of the Assembly Secretary for Health and Social Services and therefore the Health and Social Services Committee. A copy of this report will be sent to the Chair of the Health and Social Services Committee and the Assembly Secretary for Health and Social Services.

Bilingualism

The Committee wishes to continue to promote bilingual provision to the highest standards. It will consider how this can be ensured in the pattern of provision it finally decides upon, including the need to train staff to the appropriate level in both Welsh and English.

Children with Special Needs

The Committee concluded that it would wish to consider this further with special needs advisers such as the members of the Welsh Advisory Group on Special Educational Needs.
Starting Age for Formal Education

The Committee agreed that the Assembly Secretary should ask Estyn to provide a report on the advantages and disadvantages of starting formal education at age 6 rather than age 5, the current statutory age. The Report should be completed in time to feed into the next review of the National Curriculum in Wales. This was a longer term issue and should not divert the Committee from its consideration of this issue.
Annex A

Expert Adviser

Job Specification

The PRE 16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee is currently undertaking a policy review of early years’ provision for 3 year olds. It has already completed a scoping study of what is currently provided in Wales and has identified the issues that need to be addressed in developing future provision. The work of the Committee to date together with the information it has received is to be published as an initial report in April 2000.

The Terms of Reference of the next stage for which the expert adviser is required are to:

- evaluate the submissions already received by the Committee;
- identify and develop models appropriate to enriching and enhancing provision in Wales for the pattern of provision in Wales, which complement existing childcare and early years’ educational initiatives (Sure Start and the National Childcare Strategy), for the Committee’s consideration;
- advise the Committee on what pattern of provision is likely to support ‘best practice’ delivery, notably for children themselves;
- advise the Committee on the general implications of each model and any recommendations that the Committee make e.g. impact of training, equality of access and bilingual provision;
- assess the financial implications of the models and any variations recommended by the Committee; and
- assess the ability of playgroups and private providers to work within the models in light of the Playgroup Review in Wales Report.

The Committee is looking for assistance with the development of the policy and will look to the expert adviser to support the Committee in its considerations and production of a report.

The adviser will be expected to attend the meetings of the Committee when this issue is discussed, which are open to the public, provide a report to the Committee on best practice and develop models for the pattern of provision in Wales. We anticipate that this will be primarily a desk-based exercise. In addition the adviser will be expected to assist the Committee Clerk in the production of the draft report for this part of the study for the Committee’s consideration.

Time Commitment and Remuneration

The position will run from April 2000 to end of June 2000. Remuneration will be on a per diem basis of up to £150 per day depending on the experience and time commitment of the appointee. Reasonable travel and subsistence will be reimbursed at National Assembly of Wales rates.
Confidentiality

The work of the Committees is governed by the Assembly’s Standing Orders, particularly Standing Orders 7 and 8 which deal with the powers of Committees and order in Committees. Committees usually meet in public and documents relating to their deliberations are open to public inspection. However, Committees will sometimes need to consider confidential information and Standing Order 8.21 provides that a Committee can meet in private in certain circumstances. Standing Order 17 limits the right of public inspection of documents in certain circumstances including those where documents relate to Committee proceedings held in private.

It is therefore possible that during the course of the adviser’s work for the Committee they will have access to privileged and other confidential information. It will therefore be a requirement of the appointment that the confidentiality of any information supplied to the adviser is respected in order to enable them to carry out duties to which the public does not have a right of access.
Dear

Early Years Education Provision for 3 Year Olds

The PRE 16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee has decided that it will consider in detail the policy on early years’ education provision for 3 year olds. It will begin its consideration at its next meeting on 15th September 1999. Attached is the Internet entry on the PRE 16 Education Committee, which gives information on its membership and remit.

The remit of this policy development is:

To consider the current pattern of educational provision for 3 year olds; to assess whether its expansion would be in the educational and developmental interests of such children; to assess the costs of such expansion which would place a new burden on local authorities and would need to be recognised in their funding; to assess the impact of expansion on the ability of playgroups and private providers to provide childcare below compulsory school age, and to make recommendations to the Assembly Secretary for PRE 16 Education as to future policy.

The Committee would be grateful if you could let it have your organisation’s views on two distinct elements of the remit:

a) the educational and developmental value of early years’ education for 3 year olds, and
b) the cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers.

The Committee is working to a very tight deadline and plans to complete this policy development in January 2000.

Attached is a guidance note about the format of papers submitted to the Committee. You should remember that all papers submitted to the Committee will be published on the Internet and will be available to the public. If you do not wish for any matter to be placed in the public domain you will need to discuss this with the Clerk to the Committee.
All submissions should reach the Clerk no later than Friday 27th August.

If you wish to discuss any matters relating to this letter please do not hesitate to contact me at the number at the bottom of this page.

Yours sincerely

Delyth Thomas
Clerk to the Committee
List of Consultees

Local Education Authorities

Anglesey LEA
Blaenau Gwent LEA
Bridgend LEA
Caerphilly LEA
Cardiff LEA
Carmarthenshire LEA
Ceredigion LEA
Conwy LEA
Denbighshire LEA
Flintshire LEA
Gwynedd LEA
Merthyr Tydfil LEA
Monmouthshire LEA
Neath Port Talbot LEA
Newport LEA
Pembrokeshire LEA
Powys LEA
Rhondda Cynon Taff LEA
Swansea LEA
Torfaen LEA
Vale of Glamorgan LEA
Wrexham LEA

Local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships

Anglesey
Blaenau Gwent
Bridgend
Caerphilly
Cardiff
Carmarthenshire
Ceredigion
Conwy
Denbighshire
Flintshire
Gwynedd
Merthyr Tydfil
Monmouthshire
Neath Port Talbot
Newport
Pembrokeshire
Powys
Rhondda Cynon Taff
Swansea
Torfaen
Vale of Glamorgan
Wrexham

Organisations

ACCAC - Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales
Children in Wales, Early Years Unit
Chwarae Teg
Cwmni Iaith Cyf.
Estyn
Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin
National Child Minding Association Wales
National Day Nurseries Association (S Wales)
National Foundation for Educational Research
Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship
Play Wales
Playwork Interim Endorsement Group
Royal National Institute for the Blind Cymru
Wales Pre-school Playgroup Association
Welsh Local Government Association
Welsh Language Board – Education Unit

Individuals

Professor Jo Sibert, Professor of Community Child Health
Dr Gill Harper-Jones, University of Swansea, Department of Education
Professor E.C Melhuish, University of Cardiff.
Professor Sonia Jackson, University of Swansea.
Ruth Coward, Headteacher, Grangetown Nursery School
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'Providers of papers are encouraged to provide their papers bilingually if they are able and willing to do so. We expect that this will be a straightforward matter for public bodies, which have implemented Welsh language schemes under the Welsh Language Act 1993. Copies of submissions received during the consultation exercise are reproduced in the language in which they were received.'
Blaenau Gwent

The Educational Development Value of Early Years Education for Three Year Olds

The last twenty years have seen an enormous change in patterns of life in Wales, and in the lives of families and children and the availability of childcare and early childhood education. In Blaenau Gwent the socio-economic structure is the lowest of any in Wales, and early intervention is essential to ensure our children are not hindered by their background and circumstances from making the best possible use of their education.

There is also a change apparent in the structure of families in the area. Fewer children come from large families and there is an increasing rate of divorce and remarriage, which means that many children are growing up with a single parent, and step parent, step-brothers and step-sisters.

The role of the grandparent has changed from someone who lives with the parents and helps bring up the children, to a working grandparent who has his/her own life, home and interests outside grandchildren, and who cannot spend the extended time with the small child that was possible a generation ago.

Families’ lives are changing in response to a change in work and patterns of employment. More mothers are taking jobs, to supplement family hardships, and many men are unemployed.

Britain is also still an unequal society, where many children experience want and discrimination, where there are those who have, and those who have not. Here in Blaenau Gwent we have a high proportion of “have nots”, and the lowest level in Wales of registered childcare places. This is resulting in an increasing number of young children experiencing day care and early education in settings of variable quality outside the home before they start compulsory schooling, together with a large proportion of children cared for unofficially and, perhaps, inexpertly.

The understanding of the importance of quality Early Years education evidenced by the government, both when in opposition and now in power was warmly welcomed by all that had long known of its vitally important place in the education system.

All of these factors link together to signify that education for our three-year-olds is essential to provide them with the experiences necessary to ensure that children all begin full time education with a similar entitlement of pre-school experience.

We feel that education begins at birth, and that it is impossible to separate care and education. All children benefit from care and education appropriate to the development of each individual, each child develops at his/her own pace, but this can be stimulated by sympathetic intervention by qualified and experienced adults. The key to helping children learn is skilful and careful observation, assessment and planning of suitable activities related to this assessment. Young children learn best through play, talk, and experiencing activities and meeting people who can stimulate social interaction.
Quality care and education need well-trained staff and on-going training and support.

We realise that at this age learning is holistic and cannot be compartmentalised into subject areas. Learning should supplement, and in some cases substitute for, what is happening in the home. Education for three year olds is not a formal education. The children learn from planned practical experiences and the closest they get to sitting down and "learning" is when they listen to stories or sing songs and rhymes.

The Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning developed by the Welsh Qualifications and Assessment Council (ACCAC) describe the needs of pre-school children in six areas of experience which are closely related to the natural development of children's skills and abilities. These form the basis of the pre-school curriculum in maintained nurseries. Literacy and mathematics, creative development, personal and social development, physical development and knowledge and understanding of the world are dealt with through practical activities which support development in these areas.

It is an unfortunate fact that many homes in Blaenau Gwent are not providing the stimulating environment needed for children to flourish and develop these skills. Even the more financially advantaged homes often contain parents who work full time and are not aware of the needs of young children. These homes and those from the more socio-economically deprived areas may often not appreciate the social and linguistic needs of the child, more through lack of knowledge and understanding of child development than lack of love and care. It is essential to all these children that they experience education at three years old which will provide the social interaction, linguistic and creative experiences and opportunities for physical play and development that are unlikely to be available in their homes.

Education at this age is strongly based on play. Children's learning is through practical experiences combined with discussion with other children and sympathetic intervention by trained adults who understand when joining in a conversation or activity will extend a child's learning, and when the child is learning through independent play of well planned activities.

Each child is unique, with different aptitudes and interests, and will bring to school a variety of experiences upon which the teacher must build. A three year old child may come from home with much already learned, but a well-planned and organised curriculum will add immeasurably to the experiences s/he will enjoy, and will enable the child to practise skills which are unlikely to be developed in even the best home. The experienced and well-trained teacher will understand the needs of each child, the way each child learns and will plan activities to complement and support the individual child's learning.

The Cost of Expansion and Education and the Impact on Child-care Providers

Blaenau Gwent LEA has long realised the vitally important place of Early Years Education. We have used resources from our education budget to ensure that our three-year-old children have the opportunity to receive a quality pre-school education. All our three-year-old children have the opportunity to attend a half-time maintained nursery place from the September after their third birthday. Some with Special Educational Needs or with single parents in full time employment or education are allocated full time Nursery places, but we would like to extend this provision to a wider group of "needy" children.
We feel this is crucial in order to provide our children with a background founded on sound educational experiences and practice when they begin full time school. Our children are underprivileged; we must lessen the effect of this as much as possible in order to give them a fair chance at succeeding in their school careers.

If the Assembly intends to support education for three-year-olds, we in Blaenau Gwent would welcome it wholeheartedly. Government support would mean that all pupils in the LEA would benefit from increased funding, as Early Years education would then have some funding from the Welsh Assembly and more of the education budget would be able to be used for children of compulsory school age.

Child care providers in Blaenau Gwent work in close co-operation with the LEA, thanks to the development of the Early Years development forum, which was already in existence in Blaenau Gwent before the government directive. Child Minders, Pre-school play groups and LEA maintained settings, together with Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin work co-operatively, and children move from one setting to another when they are of an age, and sometimes attend one in the mornings (e.g. maintained nursery class) and another in the afternoons. (E.g. Child minder/Pre-school PlayGroup).

The principles of "Best Value" require LEAs to demonstrate the effective and efficient use of resources and to ensure avoidance of duplicate provision. As such, where there is a LEA maintained nursery place available funding is only available for a place in a non-maintained setting if the parents can demonstrate that the particular needs of this child would be better met in this setting. This is accepted by the partnership and would mean no lessening of provision from the non-maintained sector, who accept children from a younger age than the maintained sector. £830,000 was spent on 3 year olds in the nursery sector (three – four year olds) in 1998-9. The LEA also employs an Early Years advisory teacher to ensure quality of provision throughout the area, and to co-ordinate the training needs of all participants in both maintained and non-maintained settings.

Blaenau Gwent LEA feels that education for three-year-olds is essential and would be delighted if the Assembly would adopt it as a policy for development, and increase funding levels accordingly.
Caerphilly

a) Educational and developmental interest

Children enter nursery classes with a significant and varied background of learning experiences from home. Many will have further experience of learning through attending parent and toddler groups, playgroups and nursery. In whatever setting the children find themselves, adults need to provide regular opportunities that encourage children to practice newly developed skills and plan for experiences that will allow the children to acquire competence and grow in confidence. This is particularly important where the early years of children’s lives are ones of rapid growth and development, both physically and intellectually. Expansion of provision for 3 year olds should ensure that all children have these opportunities.

Recent research into brain development confirms what many parents and teachers have long known; that good parental care, warm and loving attachments between young children and adults and positive stimulation from birth can make a difference in children’s development. How children develop and learn depends on the continuous interplay between an individual’s genetic endowment and the level and appropriateness of the nutrition, surroundings, care, stimulation and teaching that are provided. Government initiatives, such as Sure Start and Healthy Living Centres are an acknowledgement that early care and education are inseparable and that early care has decisive long lasting effects on how children develop and learn. Expansion of educational provision for 3 year olds should be seen as part of Government’s overall strategy to ensure early intervention gains are maintained and developed.

Whilst welcoming the expansion of educational provision we are aware that the developmental and learning needs of pre-nursery children can be different in nature from those nearing school age. However, provided that the principles of good quality education for nursery age children are observed, evidence would suggest that there are immense gains to be had by admitting children into a pre-nursery setting. The starting point for all learning must be the child; the opportunities provided in any early years setting should be age and developmentally appropriate.

Professor Kathy Sylva’s long term research into identifying the most effective kind of early years curriculum will not be complete until the year 2000. Nevertheless indications suggest that children need a balanced, structured curriculum with a mix of child selected and teacher planned activity. In Wales, “Desirable Outcomes For Children’s Learning” produced by ACCAC, gives clear guidance as to what is expected in an early years curriculum.

"The early years curriculum is about the child. It is concerned not only with the content but also with the context of learning. The process is as important as the outcomes." Desirable Outcomes For Children’s Learning.

A good quality education of nursery age children should:

- Contributes to the all-round growth and development of every child;
- Provides a springboard for learning through both structured and spontaneous play;
- Ensures active involvement and relevant first hand experiences in an environment rich with possibilities;
The Caerphilly Childcare and Early Years Partnership is currently devising a Good Practice Guide as a baseline for quality provision for all registered settings where pre-school children are admitted. This will incorporate the above principles, and there would appear to be no reason why these cannot be extended to pre-nursery settings. In order to ensure that all providers engage with this, or other national QA schemes, e.g. as produced by MYM, Wales PPA, NCMA, there must be recognition and reward for attaining agreed standards.

Caerphilly

A number of schools in the County were party to trails of the “Four Counties Baseline Assessment Scheme” in nursery and reception classes in the Autumn of 1998. The Baseline Assessment was developed by our Advisory Service in partnership with the County Borough Councils of Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Data from this trial indicated that Caerphilly’s baseline scores were lower than each of the other three LEAs for nursery and reception pupils. At least two of the LEAs have historically admitted a high percentage of pupils into nursery classes immediately after their third birthday which may account for their increased baseline scores at 4 years of age. Analysis of our Key Stage I and 2 data this year shows smaller gains being made in Key Stage 1 than Key Stage 2 which maybe a reflection of pupils low baseline upon entry into nursery classes.

(a) The cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers

It is the policy of the Authority to provide all 3 and 4 year old pupils with at least part time LEA maintained nursery provision at their locally defined area school. The Authority’s admission policy to LEA maintained provision is that all children have a place available at their locally defined area school (subject to parental preference) in the September prior to their 5th birthday and to part time nursery provision in the same school one year earlier.

Assuming that any changes in policy would not become operational until the start of the academic year in September 2000, Caerphilly would need to find places for the 2,300 children born between September 1996 and August 1997 i.e. children who would have reached their third birthday by 31/08/00. As of Autumn 1998, according to the Social Services Section 19 Review, 2,440 part time equivalent places were available within the LEA’s nursery school and classes. This comprised of 1,706 part time places, and 367 full time equivalent places. As of January 1999, the LEA’s Analysis of School Population indicated that 1,815 children were attending on a part time basis, and 311 on a full time basis. This translates to a total of 2,437 part time equivalent places. Approximately a further 400 part time equivalent places provided by non-statutory playgroups (Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, Wales Preschool Playgroup Association, and non-affiliated groups) were assumed to be being used by 3-4 year olds at this time, and around 200 childminding places, although it is difficult to be exact about these numbers. Parents may opt to use more than one setting (LEA nursery and playgroup, for example, or use a childminder to provide “wrap around” care before and after a part time LEA place, to allow them to work or access training).
There is, therefore, capacity to provide part time places for all 3 year olds within existing LEA capacity, assuming a part time place is the total requirement per pupil for the nursery year.

Based on the 1999/2000 Average Weighted Pupil Unit of £1,672 for a full time place for an under 4, the cost of increasing the current part time equivalent places (1,706) to full time would be:

\[
\text{\£1,672 x 1,706 } = \text{ \£1,426,216} \\
2
\]

However, it is assumed that at least 50% of the 400 children in non statutory playgroups, and the 200 with childminders would also need at least part time places, costing an additional:

\[
\text{\£1,672 x 300 } = \text{ \£250,800} \\
2
\]

Therefore the total minimum annual outlay, at 1999/00 rates would be £1.68m

This figure does not take account of:

- Recruitment and set up costs
- Accommodation and equipment (although there is capacity in some schools this does not apply across the board. Cost of demountable classroom; £45,000)
- Free school meals (part time pupils are not eligible for free school meals, full time pupils are)
- Special Educational Needs
- Transport
- Possible changes in staff ratios, currently under consideration
- Children First ("looked after" children, children in need)

It is not possible to quantify these cost at present.

Current experience has shown that given a choice of setting for pre-school education parents are opting for places in the maintained sector. If full time places are funded for 3 year olds in the maintained sector many play groups would have to close as it will no longer be financially viable to remain open with children between the ages of two and a half and three only. The additional services that many of the playgroups provide for the Community would then be lost, such as the, "Doorstep" courses organised by PPA Wales. The ability of many pre-school organisations to support and maintain Parent and Toddler Groups may also be in jeopardy as often contacts made in playgroups encourage provision for younger siblings.

Working parents who currently use full time day nursery facilities may decide to avail themselves of part time places for their 3 year olds in the maintained sector and choose to use day nursery facilities for part of the day only. With a reduction in fees some daycare providers would be unable to survive and could, long term, deprive working parents of the extra hours of care they need in order to continue to work.

Childminders may find themselves caring for 3 year olds on a part time basis only if places in the maintained sector are available, which may adversely effect their livelihood.

Only a few playgroups registered with the Caerphilly Childcare and Early Years Partnership for funding under the now defunct Nursery Voucher scheme. Currently the Authority only funds that
provision which it maintains, i.e. nursery classes, nursery schools and Social Services day nurseries and family centres. Some playgroups and private nurseries have expressed anxiety about registering with the Childcare and Early Years Partnerships as they have concerns about how they would thereafter be inspected. The question of the registration and inspection of early years settings is to be considered by the National Assembly in Autumn 1999. If registered and funded to provide education, the Partnership envisages supporting voluntary and private setting by providing training in key areas and providing pre inspection and post inspection advice and support.

Conclusion

We see the expansion of provision for 3 year olds as being of immense benefit educationally and developmentally to our young children, but have concerns about its effect on childcare providers. Partnerships are continuing to develop innovative and exciting new ways of working where quality in diversity is celebrated. Funding mechanisms will need to flexible enough to acknowledge that this diversity is a necessary condition of quality in services for young children.
Carmarthenshire

Carmarthenshire submitted a joint LEA/Early Year Partnership response

Carmarthenshire LEA recognises that the first five years of a child’s life are a particularly receptive time for learning. Children need experiences which encourage all aspects of development; social, physical and intellectual.

- 'It is in their first few years that children acquire the basic skills (for learning and for living and working with others) that will serve them through the rest of life. Children’s early educational experience is crucial for the development of those skills and provides a foundation for the succeeding years in school and further education. Without a sound foundation efforts to raise educational standards in our schools and colleges will be compromised'. (‘Counting to five’ Audit Commission, 1997)

- For many years the predecessor local education authority and currently, Carmarthenshire LEA together with the diocesan authorities have made available free full-time school places in the maintained sector for all children from the term following that in which they reach the age of four. Under the arrangements for the 1998-99 Early Years Development Plan availability was extended by a further one term. This provision is made in County Primary, Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided schools, some in dedicated nursery classes, some in early years’ classes. The distribution of schools ensure that such provision is available across the County. In some parts, children of three years may attend either full-time or part-time.

- For 1999-2000, free full time places will be offered for older 3 year olds and all 4 year olds in all schools in the maintained sector as follows.
  - For the Autumn Term 1999 - those born between 1 September 1995 and 31 December 1995.
  - For the Spring Term 2000 - those born between 1 January 1996 and 31 March 1996.
  - For the Summer Term 2000 - those born between 1 April 1996 and 31 August 1996.
  - In addition to the above some schools will be offering places for young three year olds either on a part-time or full-time basis.
  - Younger three year olds however are not able to access education across the LEA. Provision for younger three year olds is currently located mainly in urban areas.

Carmarthenshire LEA believes that:

- all three year olds have equal entitlement to high quality provision.
- this provision should be focused on educational quality and should be suitably resourced.
- the role of this educational provision can be broadly described within the context of social, intellectual and emotional development of the young child.
- the major value which is placed on early years education is its potential to be of lasting value to the individual child.
- such potential cannot be separated from the quality and content of the curriculum.
- the effectiveness of home/school links.
• the continuity of educational experience from nursery to primary education.

• research based on the long term follow-up of children who experienced nursery education suggest that there are significant positive benefits in terms of school performance, attitudes and aspirations.

• the learning methods used by young children tend to set a pattern for strategies which they will comfortably use throughout their lives. If children are encouraged to be independent, questioning, active and exploratory learners then it is likely that they will continue to apply and use such techniques.

• school gives the opportunity to many children to grow in confidence. Many children particularly in rural areas will not have had an opportunity to play and interact with others of their own age. Experience of working, sharing and talking in groups of varying numbers assist children to operate in social contexts.

• admission of three year olds to school further assists the process of achieving bi-lingualism from an early age.

• initially young children need some supportive language to assist them towards independent reflection and the ability to explain their thoughts clearly. Suitably qualified, trained early years educators place talking and listening at the centre of all activities encouraging children to describe and review their learning with others.

• it is vital that all staff involved have been trained appropriately for the work they do with under fives. whether initially or through in-service training

Cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers

Costs

In order for all three year olds in Carmarthenshire to have full time education beginning at the start of the term of their third birthday, we would estimate the cost to be about £1.5 million. Part-time provision already exists in the more urban areas of Carmarthenshire but it would be difficult to have part-time provision in the more rural areas. The only logical conclusion would be total full time provision. The £1.5 million is revenue only. It is difficult to estimate the capital requirements but, with a large number of surplus places, the capital resources required should not be significant.

Effect on childcare providers

There is not a great deal of childcare provision in Carmarthenshire and the impact should not be significant since the already existing providers could increase their own numbers of younger children.
Ceredigion

A  The educational and developmental value of early years education for 3 year olds.

- Parents are the child’s first educators and the impression should not be given that ‘education’ outside the home is always the only way, or the best and most suitable method of ensuring the full development of 3 year olds.

- Children will use the foundations laid down during these early years as the basis upon which to build the rest of their lives. This is an important period in itself and is not only a preparation for adulthood. It is important that the education world bears this in mind and does not view the provision solely as a preparation for later learning.

- By providing high quality ‘education’ in the early years, a strong foundation is laid for the personal, social and mental development of the child in the future. Such education also lays the foundation for literacy, numeracy and the understanding of the world around us.

- High quality early education:
  - contributes to the growth and development of the whole child.
  - ensures active involvement and direct, relevant experiences in an environment rich in learning experiences, if the parents so wish.
  - contributes to the child’s full development if it is based on good learning principles of play and discovery, the acquired use of language in different situations, and research and discovery of the surrounding world.
  - offers opportunities and experiences which lead young children towards an awareness of their Welshness – their language and culture, as is provided presently by Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin and the Nursery Units of the LEA. They lay a bilingual grounding for the children within the County where Welsh is the main learning medium in the majority of schools and where every school aims to provide equal bilingualism. These opportunities are valuable for those children who come from homes where Welsh is not their first language.
  - appreciates the contribution of parents or carers to their children’s education and encourages an active partnership between them.
  - ensures equal opportunities for children with special needs, for those from different cultures, and for boys and girls.

- Teaching young children is complex and highly demanding of those who are involved in the process. Working effectively with children of this age calls for a wide range of skills, a broad and thorough understanding of the educational and developmental requirements of children within this particular age range, as well as other characteristics. The question remains whether children as young as this should be at home with their parents.

- What is required – the teaching of 3 year olds or the teaching of good parenting to parents? Should we ‘force’ parents to go out to work rather than encourage them to remain at home to complete their duties?
B. The cost of expanding the provision and the effect on childcare providers

- There are a number of factors involved in funding a suitable and purposeful provision for this age:

  - the suitability of the buildings and their maintenance costs. At present, there is a great variety within the County. (See the current situation within the County).
  - the qualifications of the adults who provide the education. At present, they vary from qualified teachers to voluntary providers with an NVQ qualification.
  - the cost of training in order to ensure quality.
  - the ratio of children to adults. There is a great variety between the maintained sector - 1 adult to 13 children, and the non-maintained sector - 1 adult to 8 children. There is a need to reconcile the ratio for both sectors. This would have great financial implications.
  - the cost of inspecting the provision. The non-maintained provision is inspected on an annual basis by Inspectors of the Social Services who concentrate mainly on health and safety. In the maintained sector, the situation is reviewed every 6 years and concentrates on the quality of the whole provision. Partnerships are also required to review their provision on a regular basis in order to ensure that the provision is of the highest quality and suitable for the County’s requirements.
  - suitable resources. Suitable education provision for this age group requires many large and costly play/discovery resources as well as a good pool of minor resources.
  - travelling/transporting children particularly in rural areas. Currently, most of the maintained and private provision is located in towns and the non-maintained provision in rural areas. Centralising the provision at purposeful locations would entail transporting the children. At present, children are transported by LEA providers only if there is room in a bus/car. It should also be borne in mind that such young children require carers.
  - administration costs. This sector is administered by the relevant agencies. If funds are transferred to the Partnerships, then an administrator or a number of administrators will be required to deal with this complex work.

- The current situation within Ceredigion –

  - At present, all four year-olds are taught within LEA schools dependent upon their parents’ wishes.
  - A large number of children who receive this provision are in classes of mixed ages – some include two learning ages but others include 4-7 year olds as illustrated in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom with one age range</th>
<th>Classroom with two age ranges</th>
<th>Classroom with three age ranges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>61%</td>
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</table>
- There are 8 designated nursery classes within the County which provide part-time education for 3 year olds (slightly less than half the number of 3 year olds). Bilingual education is presented with the emphasis on the main language of the school.
- The remaining 3 year olds in Ceredigion receive a part-time education in various situations and under the management of different providers.
- 58 Nursery Groups under the auspices of Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin which are located at various sites such as purposeful buildings on school campuses, village halls or chapel vestries. Welsh is the main medium of the provision, in line with neighbouring schools.
- 6 Private Nursery Schools have been purposefully designed to offer daycare as well as education – 3 are private provisions and 3 are linked to workplaces. Welsh-language provision is given by a section of Mudiad Ysgol Meithrin, in accordance to parents’ wishes.
- 6 Nursery Groups under the auspices of the WPPA, which like MYM, also provides part-time education for 3 year olds in various buildings. These groups are mainly English-language provisions and Welsh is presented as a second language by the Association’s Language Officer.
- A large number of child carers in the home - registered and non-registered such as family members or friends. Registered providers receive the support of the Development Officer of the National Childminders’ Association.

The effect on child care providers

- The future of voluntary providers such as Mudiad Ysgolion Metihrin and the Pre-Play Association will be at stake if the provision for 3 year olds is funded in the maintained sector only.
- The quality of the educational and care provision should be ensured. It will be necessary for all providers to meet the requirements of the Early Years and Childcare Partnership which in turn will conform to the requirements of the National Assembly.
- The professional qualification of the provider. A considerable amount of suitable training will be required in order to ensure the best provision. Who will fund this? What sort of qualification will be considered appropriate for teaching 3 year olds?
- There will be a continual need for care providers if these children are offered part-time education. Would parents be willing to pay for this additional care? Are there sufficient opportunities in Ceredigion to attract parents to work and pay for care provision?
- They must meet the inspection requirements of the Social Services and ESTYN.
- A change in the working pattern of home care providers – younger children need to be transported and collected from establishments which hold the education provision.
City and County of Cardiff

a) The educational and developmental value of early years education for three year olds

Introduction

Those involved with young children have long provided testimony to the significant and long-term value to be gained from the provision of early education. The Local Authority of Cardiff has been convinced of its benefits for many years. Nationally in the UK, maintained nursery education has long been targeted at three and four year old children. This local authority has been committed to the provision of as much maintained early years’ provision as local government finance could afford.

Nursery provision in Cardiff has been prioritised in the past to those areas with the highest level of social need. Children in those areas have frequently been able to access LEA nursery education as soon as they reach their third birthday. This has been an important way in which the local authority has enhanced the developmental and educational opportunities for those children.

Whilst it has always been difficult to disentangle the effects of early education provision from other variables so as to prove its particular benefits, research evidence has accrued over recent years. A body of significant international evidence now shows that high quality early years’ education is undoubtedly beneficial in terms of children’s development, their future educational achievement, and indeed their long-term life chances. The greatest benefits have been shown to be for the most economically disadvantaged children. Studies from the US also indicate that significant cost benefits accrue to public expenditure from provision of excellent early years provision.¹

Developmental Value

Contrary to previously wide-held views there is growing scientific evidence that children are not born with a fixed intellectual potential. Recent brain science shows that children’s capacities are most significantly developed when they are very young, and that the development of these capacities is affected by the learning opportunities they experience.²

Developing physical mental and emotional capabilities, and learning how to learn, is a social process from birth onward. By the age of three most children benefit from the wider and distinctive opportunities for learning which can be provided within the social context of good nursery education.

For many children good quality nursery education at the age of three can provide developmental opportunities which would not otherwise be available to them. Conversely, missing out on such developmental opportunities can lead to incremental disadvantage as children grow up.

¹ Notably longitudinal studies by Schweinhart and Weikart at the High Scope Educational Research Foundation Ypsilanti, Michigan
² Leading UK researchers in this field include Susan Greenfield, Oxford University
Educational Value

The type of education provided for young children has been shown to be crucial. Both a formal skills based curriculum, and provision which is based entirely on free play, have been shown to be inappropriate and to actually mitigate against the intended benefits. It is consequently important that informed professional judgement underpins organised early years’ educational provision.

Foundations for positive attitudes to learning are achieved through early education in which very young children experience achievement and success. Methods of working need to provide feedback so that children can learn to reflect on their experiences. Methods should help children to build their identities and believe in themselves as successful learners with skills to overcome challenges. These qualities are prerequisites for achievement in later schooling and they underpin lifelong learning. It is key for children to develop what has been called ‘can do’ attitudes or ‘learning mastery’ at this stage.

The essential educational partnerships between schools and parents can be easiest to establish with very young children. Educational provision for three year olds can make an important contribution to supporting some parents in approaches to parenting and can underpin the development of partnerships which will continue to support children’s achievement as they go through for the later years of schooling and into employment.

Conclusion

The National Commission on Education (1993) commissioned reviews of research on the benefits of early years’ education and subsequently arrived at clear recommendations to invest in early years’ education. Evidence since that date can only reinforce the findings. Experience and research coincide: the advantages of good early years’ education for three year olds are undoubted.

For the Cardiff Authority the real issues about policy development do not relate the value of early years education but rather to:

- A concern that the Assembly should fully recognise the real costs of good quality early years’ provision.
- A concern that the Assembly should clarify how a three year old is defined if new requirements are to be placed on local authorities. (This needs to be linked with 1 above.)
- A concern about the difficulties in trying to plan and provide equitably for what in Cardiff, we have taken to terming ‘younger three year olds’. Cardiff’s Early Years Development Plan provides more detail and indicates the dilemma. It relates to both 1 and 2 above.

Both 2 and 3 are addressed in the next part of this paper. The Committee will be aware that in Cardiff, as in most of Wales, most children are offered a full year in a reception class.

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3 Leading UK Researcher in this field is Kathy Sylva, Oxford University
In practice the majority of children who spend a full year in part-time nursery education are three when they begin and four when they finish. As explained in the introduction, in some areas of the city many children have been able to benefit from more than a year’s experience in a nursery class.

b) The cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers

There are notably a number of key issues for Cardiff County Council in relation to the provision of nursery places for all three-year-olds, which would have a significant effect on future policy development. Essentially these issues are: -

- The authority would have difficulties in establishing nursery education places that were both cost effective and of a high quality if it became policy to offer places to all children ‘as they become three’. Cardiff already offers a free part-time nursery education place to all children who will be four during the school year. In almost 100% of cases this place is offered within a local authority maintained nursery school or unit. This local policy has enabled many of Cardiff’s three-year-old population to benefit from this early years education provision.

If it is government policy for all children be offered nursery places ‘as they become three’ then such a policy would present a number of difficulties to the authority. Many nurseries would remain empty for the majority of the school year, as children slowly take up placements following their third birthday. This would have subsequent implications for the employment of teaching and support staff to facilitate this arrangement. The authority, whilst mindful of the need to be cost effective, would also need to ensure that adequate ratios and resources are in place as children are admitted to the setting. Teaching staff would find planning and preparing more difficult as children at different stages of development would be taking up places throughout the year.

- Local Voluntary and Private Providers of nursery provision would have difficulties in sustaining provision for younger children if it became policy to offer local authority places to all children ‘as they become three’.

Both voluntary and private providers of nursery provision currently experience difficulties in maintaining sustainability as a result of younger children (children who are 3 after 31st August) taking up spare places within local authority nursery schools and units. In many cases a child may attend a voluntary or private setting from when they are 2½yrs, moving onto a local authority nursery as soon as they reach the age of three. Currently this is still dependent on places within local authority settings becoming available, and therefore fuels the argument of the Partnership that there is inequity of nursery provision for children across Cardiff, dependant on where in the County a child happens to reside.
Of equal importance there is also a real concern that as more three-year-old children move into maintained settings, voluntary playgroups become unsustainable thereby resulting in reduced provision of services for younger children (2½ yrs) and their parents.

The table below highlights some of the possible impacts on the statutory, private and voluntary sectors that are likely to occur resulting from an expansion of nursery provision to include places for all three year olds.
**Expansion of Nursery Provision - Directly by the Local Authority**

- The Local Authority would need additional capital funding for new build/extension of existing buildings to provide places for all three year olds.
- It is difficult to foresee how equity of provision could be achieved across the county because there are some schools which cannot physically expand to accommodate new places.
- Additional revenue funding would be needed to support additional staff required for the provision of these nursery places.
- Additional revenue funding would be needed to support younger children who have been identified as having Special Educational Needs (Approx. £62k).
- Expansion of nursery provision would have implications for the administrative support required to assist with the central management of nursery admissions, which would ensure the establishment of a fair, transparent and equitable admissions system.

**Possible Impact on Local Authority**

- Non-maintained provisions (Voluntary & Private) would close as younger children take up places in maintained nurseries.
- Early years education provision for younger children (2-2½yrs) would suffer, as the provisions become financially unsustainable.
- Voluntary specialist groups such as the under fives scheme which supports children with special needs would be likely to be non-viable as more children are supported in maintained settings. This would reduce the opportunities for support for younger children aged 2½.

**Possible Impact on Non-Maintained Providers**

- Funding would provide sustainability for many groups who are currently struggling.
- Registered Childminders who are part of an accredited network may wish to be considered for funding, pending.

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**Funding Nursery Provision for all Three Year Olds within the Voluntary & Private Sectors**

- The Local Authority is not in a position to guarantee that there would be sufficient high quality nursery education placements available within the private and voluntary sector to provide nursery places for all three-year-olds.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expansion of nursery provision would have implications for the administrative support required to assist with the central management of nursery admissions, which would ensure the establishment of a fair, transparent and equitable admissions system.</td>
<td>• Registered Childminders who are part of an accredited network may wish to be considered for funding, pending.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
olds whose parents choose to take one.

- If a decision were to be taken to fund all three-year-old nursery placements in the voluntary & private sectors, there effectively would be a reduction in Local Authority Services in the poorest areas of the County, where children are most needy.

- If a decision is taken to fund all three year old nursery placements in the voluntary & private sectors, then there would be potential staff losses within the Local Authority, with a concomitant loss of professional expertise in early years. There would be under utilisation of buildings in schools which already provide nursery places for younger three year olds (mainly in the southern arc of the county)

- Additional revenue funding would be required to support the Local Authority, who will still have the responsibility to ensure that there is high quality provision of both education and care in the non-maintained sector. More providers for small numbers of children add significantly to the Local Authority Quality Assurance costs and provide added difficulties of achieving cost effectiveness

- Voluntary Groups such as snap and the Under Fives Scheme may require additional support to enable the recruitment, training and management of support workers who will work within the voluntary and private settings.

further guidance from the National Assembly in respect of its work with the NCMA
| There would be extra responsibility on the Local Authority to support children who are three with SEN within non-maintained settings. This would have revenue implications either through expansion of voluntary/private groups or through the establishment of other systems. |
ANNEX 1

Estimated projection of local demand and provision 1999/2000 (3 year old nursery education) at 1999 costs.

### KEY

- Unit cost per child per term for 5 x 2½ hrs session per week during term time
  - £275.00

- Information on projected demand and provision is based on total number of pupils aged 3 in Cardiff (GP register data 1999)

- The total capacity of LEA nursery facilities, less the total number of places allocated to children who are already four, taking into account denominational and Welsh Language preferences

# fte - full time equivalent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Autumn Term 1999</th>
<th></th>
<th>Spring Term 2000</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demand</td>
<td>*Places fte #</td>
<td>Shortfall of places</td>
<td>Financial implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County of Cardiff</td>
<td>4098</td>
<td>2127</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>£542,025.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                      | Summer Term 2000 |           | Financial Implications |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------|
|                      | Demand | *Places Fte | Shortfall of places | £851,400.00 |
|                      | 4047    | 951        | 3096             |           |

Approximated yearly cost of expansion of nursery education provision to include 3 year olds
- £2,101,825.00

If the authority provided for all children who will become three during the school year at the beginning of the school year it is estimated that it would cost:
- £3,380,850.00

The above table is based on a staggered entry, as children become three. However this approach could raise issues in relation to employment and potentially reduce the quality of provision.
City and County of Swansea

The educational and developmental value of Early Years education for three year olds

Early Years care and education is an integral part of good quality education and also an integral part of our economic policy. The City and County of Swansea has, and continues to give, high priority to Early Years provision.

Swansea has a long-established tradition of providing Nursery education based on sound principles of child development. The whole child is considered to be important: health, physical and mental development is emphasised as well as the importance of feelings and thinking and spiritual aspects.

Starting school is one of the most important experiences of a child’s life. It is a step into a new world which should be exciting, exhilarating and the future development of the child very much depends on the expectations and perceptions of the staff who work with them.

The most important learning in pre-school (nursery) education has to do with aspiration, socialisation and self-esteem. No-one learns effectively without motivation, social skills and confidence and very few fail to learn successfully if they have developed these enabling attitudes and dispositions to learning. The Early Years curriculum should be concerned not only with the content but the context of learning.

Young children learn through observation, exploration and interaction with people and the environment. Learning should be active and not passive or didactic. It should be enjoyable and promote the natural curiosity of every child. Above all it must be relevant to the child. Play has a fundamental role in early childhood supplying the foundation upon which learning is built.

Every child enters school having had a different and wide variety of home experiences which will have been learnt informally. It is extremely important that schools start with the needs of the child and continue to provide an informal, experiential learning environment which compliments the home setting. Schools should value highly the ‘givens’ that the child brings with him/her to school and the role of parents as the child’s first educators. Education of the young should be a true partnership between children, their parents and the school. Each has a vital role to play in the development of learning skills.

Childhood should be seen as valid in itself, as part of life and not simply a preparation for adulthood. This education is seen similarly as something of the present and not just preparation and training for later. However, an appropriate education for three year olds which includes assessment can help with early identification of children with special educational needs from which an appropriate individual educational plan can be devised.

All children have a right to an equal start in life. The education and care of three year olds can provide a better start for children by the time they reach compulsory school age.

The skills and competencies which young children develop during the years before formal schooling are of vital importance in their overall personal development. They will not only enable children to take pride in their achievements but, through acquiring these personal skills, children can, with our help, perceive that they are effective and competent people.
A good Early Years curriculum promotes active learning and active minds. The curriculum should be planned to provide for each child’s stage of development, needs and interest and should be broad, balanced, relevant, differentiated and coherent.

The introduction of the National Curriculum has done much to diminish the quality of early childhood learning and there needs to be a re-focusing of the priorities of learning and teaching for young children if they are to succeed both educationally and socially. In order to achieve this, there must be an upwards pressure from quality early learning rather than a downwards pressure from the formality of the National Curriculum.

Young children should be provided with a developmentally appropriate curriculum which has been devised to meet their needs and interests and allows them to develop at their own rate. It should be delivered in a way that is relevant to the needs of the children, through structured play and programmes of experiential learning. Formal methodology is not a suitable teaching style when dealing with young children and teachers should be mindful about the introduction of some concepts and skills before children are developmentally ready.

The document ‘Desirable outcomes for children’s learning before compulsory school age’ states that it is intended as a curriculum for children before they reach the age of five when statutory education begins.

The 1995 update of the National Curriculum in Wales states that Key Stage 1 broadly covers Years 1 and 2 with precise definitions in 3 (3-6) of the Education Reform Act, as amended by the Education Act 1993. This would suggest that the ‘Desirable outcomes for children’s learning before compulsory school age’ is, in the case of City and County of Swansea schools, a two year programme of experiential learning.

Clearly, good Early Years practice can offer some aspects of the National Curriculum to children who are developmentally ready during the reception year but a premature introduction to formal written work should be avoided. The early years of education should not be used as a vehicle for easing the burden of the content of the National Curriculum as young children may be asked to complete inappropriate tasks. This has been shown to lead to school failure at a later stage.

The cost of expansion and the impact on childcare

At present 2,834 three year olds receive 0.5 part time Nursery education in schools in Swansea. The LEA funds schools to provide part time education from the September following the child’s third birthday. Schools do have the ability to admit children earlier, e.g. immediately after their third birthday providing they have room and fund this from within their own delegated resources. The cost of this provision is £3.3 million pounds.

Note: the LEA offers a full time place for all pupils in the County in the September following their fourth birthday. Therefore the City and County of Swansea more than meets its statutory obligation in relation to the education of three and four year olds and has no immediate plans for expansion of provision.
Increased provision in Swansea could mean:

- funding three year olds the term after their third birthday;
- funding full time Nursery education for three year olds.

The cost of the first option is unknown. The cost of the second option would be at least £3.3 million excluding any capital cost of buildings or extending classrooms. There would also be additional costs for:

a) Training

There would be an additional cost for training staff:

- GEST funding would need to be increased to develop the understanding and skills of teachers responsible for Early Years education.
- Subsidised training for staff, eg NNEBs, NVQs, Learning Assistants.
- Funding to train Primary Advisers, Early Years Advisers, Development Officers, Inspectors, Trainers.

b) Staffing

Additional cost for:

- Early Years teacher for all settings.
- Improving ratio of adults to children to match requirements of Nursery education.

c) Physical resources

- To improve classrooms to meet needs of three year olds. This has implication for size, space, area and equipment.
- To improve toilet facilities to make them suitable for young children.
- To improve and create resources for outdoor play.
- Security measures for Early Years units.

It is not possible to give a precise estimate of these.

**The impact of expansion of provision on childcare providers**

This response has focused on the impact of provision in the maintained sector. At present the Wales Pre-school Playgroups Association, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrim, Private day nurseries, Childminders provide for three year olds. It is difficult to predict the impact on childcare provision but experience in England suggests there may be an adverse impact. The Assembly will wish to consider carefully the possible effect on Welsh Language provision where many Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrim groups are small.
CONWY

Conwy Early Years Development Plan states that 3 year olds attend maintained schools on a .5 basis from the September after their 3rd birthday. This provision is available in all maintained Primary and Infant schools within the County Borough of Conwy. The Plan is reviewed annually. Conwy LEA values and support a variety of provision for children prior to their admission to part-time schooling and would wish to see this continued.

Response to specific elements of the remit:

(a) The educational and developmental value of early years education for 3 year olds

The rising 3 year olds and younger 3 year olds not attending school benefit from an informal setting with play based activities and higher child:adult ratios. This allows each child to develop at his/her own pace prior to school admission and allows parents to choose flexible session attendance to meet the needs of the child.

Conwy LEA supports this continuum from informal to gradual formal early years education.

The part-time provision for older three year olds in schools secures a gradual integration and socialisation into the more formal school setting. It also introduces the children to the Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning (ACCAC) within the appropriate age group. The LEA welcomes the positive steps that are taking place in Conwy regarding liaison and joint training with the non-statutory sector. This will lead to quality experiences for all three year olds in the County Borough in all settings.

(b) The cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers

Conwy LEA welcomes the continuation of the status quo in Conwy which at present has no additional cost for children entering school the September after their third birthday. Conwy LEA would welcome guaranteed funding to secure good quality pre-school provision with the emphasis on play based developmental experiences.

The strengthening of this provision would be extremely cost effective.

Conwy LEA recognises and appreciates the role of the non-statutory sector in pre-school provision for three year olds and works in close partnership with this sector through the Early Years and Childcare Strategy Partnership.
DENBIGHSHIRE

The LEA provides full time places for all children from the September following their 4th birthday. Provision on a 0.5 basis is offered to all children from the September following their 3rd birthday.

The LEA wishes to continue with these arrangements but is not looking to extend its provision for the 3 year olds. Partnerships with voluntary and private day care providers are well established, with many areas offering full day care facilities to those parents wishing it.

The LEA considers it’s provision for 3 year olds as a strong foundation for Early Years’ education. Children learn through carefully structured programmes in a caring environment. Every school keeps detailed entry profiles on all children, providing sound basis for planning and early identification of children with special needs.
FLINTSHIRE

Flintshire LEA guarantees every child, whose parents wish it, a part time place in the Nursery class/Early years Unit of their local primary school. This begins in the September following the child's third birthday and continues for a full year.

a) For approximately 25 years Flintshire has provided part time education for 3 years olds. It began as .5 provision but was reduced to .25 for a 10 year period when funding was difficult. When .5 provision was returned in 1996 every school reported that their nursery children had made better progress with the increased time.

Much has been, and continues to be, researched and written on the value of early years education and our schools, since 1996, are actually experiencing the difference it makes.

The period from 3 to 5 years of age is a very formative time on the lifelong learning continuum and 3 is the age when parents feel their children are ready for more 'education' than they can provide. It is also the time when, given the right conditions, there will be an unlocking of the potential which is in every child. We do feel that all early years education, in whatever setting, needs to be consistent and provide for the all round growth of the child, catering for physical, social, emotional and intellectual development. What is good for the child at 3 in a school nursery must be good for a child in a playgroup, with a child minder or in a private day nursery. This consistency can be achieved in school nursery classes/units where policy into practice can be monitored and in service training for all staff organised. Hopefully the Early Years and Childcare Partnerships should go some way to achieve this in all settings with agreed philosophy, policy and shared practical advice via joint training.

Children at three (and beyond) need:

- an appropriate, developmental curriculum which is in harmony with their own particular needs and interests
- to learn by doing, experiencing a curriculum firmly based in play and discovery
- to be guided and nurtured by suitably qualified early years educators who care as well as educate.
- to learn in a suitably planned, safe environment

Where three-year-olds are in an Early Years Unit mixing with children of up to 5 years of age our own recent experiences are showing that this has added value. Flintshire's schools who have recently introduced Under Fives Units are reporting that there is improvement in all round development of the children especially their social skills and independence.

We are aware that some of our three year olds, depending on when their birthday falls, may not enter Nursery class until they are almost four, they do, however, receive the same amount of provision and move through the rest of their school lives with their peer group. Playgroups have an important part to play providing for the two and a half to 4 year olds and especially the 3-year-olds not in school nursery classes or units. Although the LEA gives grants to MYM and WPPA they would benefit from more funding. The LEA would find it difficult to give more owing to the amount of under fives funding already directed at schools to continue the good provision.
b) Last year Flintshire LEA spent £1.4 million on Nursery education for 3/4 year olds which provided for staff and services mainly. The area where there is the greatest need for funding is outdoor play facilities and resources, both of which are expensive but essential to fulfil an appropriate curriculum.

For Flintshire provision to expand to take 3 year olds from, for example as some authorities do, the week or even the term following their third birthday would have great implications not only in doubling the above figure for staffing but also for buildings and accommodation, resources and training. A change in admission policies would cause great disruption and, we feel would not benefit our children greatly.

The impact on all other providers would be significant, especially playgroups, virtually forcing them to cater for the under 3s only. Other providers running businesses such as childminders and private day nurseries would also suffer as parents proved when Nursery voucher scheme was introduced they did not choose to send their children to other settings when a place was available in their local school nursery class.

We do feel that our provision for 3-year-olds at present is ideal both educationally and developmentally.
**MONMOUTHSHIRE**

This is a joint response with the Early Year Partnership

Currently, throughout Wales there is an unequal provision of early years education, some children attend local authority nursery settings for 3 terms before starting school some are funded for one or two terms in playgroups or private nurseries. Some children, i.e. those born in the summer term may not receive any funding to attend a pre-school education setting before starting in a reception class in the term after their fourth birthday.

Initial research in Monmouthshire into the results of baseline assessment (which is carried out during the first seven weeks after a child has started school) indicate that it is often the youngest reception children who are most likely to have low scores (although they often catch up by the end of the reception year). These youngest children especially, need good quality pre-school education (either in local authority nurseries or in settings approved by Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships) in order to ensure all children have the opportunity to develop or extend good language, literacy and communication, mathematical and personal social skills.

By providing all children with three terms of funded pre-school education and through the use of unified nursery profile systems and appropriate staff training more children with special educational needs would be identified earlier.

Where children attend local authority or approved non-maintained settings there is a greater opportunity to ensure a good quality education through the use of qualified staff, appropriate training, the inspection process and the encouragement of quality assurance systems.

**The Cost of Expansion and the Impact on Childcare Providers in Monmouthshire.**

Monmouthshire County Council has seven nursery units attached to mainstream schools.

These units admit pupils in the September following their third birthday to half-time nursery provision.

The places at the nursery units are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Places</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caldicot Sandy Lane Infants</td>
<td>52 half-time places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caldicot West End Infants</td>
<td>78 half-time places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llwynu Infants</td>
<td>104 half-time places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembroke Infants</td>
<td>52 half-time places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyesham Infants</td>
<td>48 half-time places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magor Voluntary-Aided Primary</td>
<td>52 half-time places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornwell Primary</td>
<td>78 half-time places</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 464 half-time places

Presently there are an estimated 12 half-time places vacant in LEA maintained nursery units. There is a shortfall in maintained provision for approximately 171 four-year-old children who become eligible during the 1999-2000 academic year and who live outside LEA maintained nursery units catchment.
areas. It is intended that this shortfall be addressed through the use of non-maintained approved settings. Currently there are 38 approved non-maintained providers in Monmouthshire (Annex 1) and new providers are encouraged to seek approval in order to extend parental choice.

An estimated 133 pupils in LEA maintained nursery units whose fourth birthdays fall between 1st April and 31st August will not be “eligible four year olds” during their time in nursery provision.

Many three-year-olds already attend approved non-maintained settings although they are not funded by the Partnership to do so. Because parents have to pay, these children usually only attend for two or three sessions per week. Approved settings reported 310 vacant places in January 1999, which is equivalent to 62 half-time places (providing five sessions per week). Allowing for the fact that many younger children attend settings for at least some sessions, this situation is barely adequate to meet future demand. Should early years education provision be expanded in the future, some areas could find it difficult to accommodate local needs.

If provision is expanded to allow all children to access 3 terms of pre-school education prior to starting school, the excess accommodated in the non-maintained sector i.e. approved playgroups and private nurseries, the cost to the authority would be in the region of £950,000 not including any special educational needs support funding or qualified teacher and administrative support. Working in partnership, there are no plans by Monmouthshire’s Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships or Local Education Authority to increase maintained provision. This would be inappropriate in Monmouthshire as it is a rural authority and parents need access to good quality education places for their children within a reasonable distance of their homes.

In order to facilitate such an expansion more providers in the non-maintained sector should be encouraged to seek approval which would increase demand for appropriately qualified Childcare Workers. The local authority would need to provide qualified teacher support for in excess of forty non-maintained approved settings and support would be needed centrally to deal with the funding and administrative implications.

Non-maintained approved settings would benefit from the continuity of the funding, at present many rural playgroups struggle during the autumn term when they do not have any funding for eligible four year olds. Childminders could lose out if some of the children they presently care for were alternatively to attend an education setting, however presumably they would be needed to provide ‘wrap around care’, particularly with the increase in numbers of parents returning to work with the aid of Families Tax Credit and in line with the recent Childcare Strategy Initiatives.
## ANNEX 1

### APPROVED NON-MAINTAINED PROVIDERS IN MONMOUTHSHIRE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider Name</th>
<th>Address Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abacus Day Nursery</td>
<td>Newmarket House, 26 Lion Street, Abergavenny, NP7 5NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abergavenny Nursery</td>
<td>Girl Guide Centre, The Fairfield, Abergavenny, NP7 5TN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agincourt School</td>
<td>New Dixton Road, Monmouth, NP5 4SJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabet Playgroup</td>
<td>Magor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluebells Nursery</td>
<td>Recreation Hall, The Close, Portskwett, NP6 4SW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy Bodies at Trellech Playgroup</td>
<td>The Narth Village Hall, Monmouth, NP5 4AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clydach Playgroup and Parent and Toddlers</td>
<td>Old Infants School, Clydach CP School, Clydach, NP7 0LL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Ash Under Fives</td>
<td>Cross Ash Village Hall, Cross Ash, Abergavenny, NP7 8PL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cylch Meithrin Cil-y-coed</td>
<td>Caldicot Leisure Centre, Caldicot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cylch Meithrin Y Fenni</td>
<td>Our Lady of St. Michael Parish Hall, Y Fenni, NP7 5YA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govilon Playgroup Association</td>
<td>The Demountable, 43 The Avenue, Govilon, Abergavenny, NP7 9PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall Park Under 5’s</td>
<td>Llanthony Close, Caldicot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopscotch Nursery</td>
<td>Gilwern CEC, Upper Common, Gilwern, NP7 0DS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack &amp; Jill’s Under 5’s</td>
<td>Old School Buildings, School Lane, Penperlleni, Pontypool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanellen Playgroup</td>
<td>Llanellen, Abergavenny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanfoist Playgroup</td>
<td>St. Faiths Church Hall, Merthyr Road, Llanfoist, Abergavenny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llantilio Pertholey Playgroup</td>
<td>Community Hall, St. David Road, Llantilio Pertholey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magor Playgroup</td>
<td>Undy Memorial Hall, Dinch Hill, Undy, Magor, NP6 3JL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathern Playgroup</td>
<td>Old School, Mathern, Chepstow, NP6 6JD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathern Playgroup</td>
<td>Mathern Village Hall, Mathern, NP6 6JL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth Community Playgroup</td>
<td>Overmonnow Family Learning Centre, Victoria Estate, Monmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth Montessori School</td>
<td>Llangattock-Vidon-Avel, Nr. Monmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevill Hall Creche</td>
<td>Nevill Hall Hospital, Abergavenny, NP7 7EG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pandy Under Fives</td>
<td>Village Hall, Pandy, Abergavenny, NP7 8DW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembroke Road Playgroup</td>
<td>Fairfield Road, Bulwark, Chepstow, NP6 5AF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raglan Stepping Stones Playgroup</td>
<td>Chepstow Road, Raglan, NP5 2EN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside Nursery</td>
<td>11 Lower Church Street, Chepstow, NP6 5HJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scallywags Private Day Nursery</td>
<td>The Storehouse, Howells Place, Monmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seddon House School</td>
<td>Dingestow, Monmouth, NP5 4YD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirenewton Playgroup</td>
<td>Shirenewton Community Hall, Shirenewton, Chepstow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Arvans Playgroup</td>
<td>Memorial Hall, St. Arvans, Chepstow, NP6 6EJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sticky Fingers Under 5’s</td>
<td>Crawley Hall, Bryngwyn, Raglan, NP5 2BH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summers Day Nursery</td>
<td>Monmouth Road, Abergavenny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunflowers, Old School Building</td>
<td>Monmouth Road, Usk, NP5 1SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tip Toes Under Fives Playgroup</td>
<td>Scout Hall, Off Fairfield Car Park, Abergavenny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tymperleys Nursery</td>
<td>9 Sandy Lane, Caldicot, NP6 4NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usk Nursery</td>
<td>Usk CV School, Monmouth Road, Usk, NP5 1SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usk Town Playgroup</td>
<td>HMP Social Club, Maryport Street, Usk, NP5 1X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds
NEATH PORT TALBOT

The Elected Members of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council have continued to support Early Years Provision within our schools indeed all infant and primary schools in Neath Port Talbot admit 3 year olds as soon as possible after their 3rd birthday on a half day basis. Those schools are funded directly via our Local Management of Schools scheme for the Summer Term after their 3rd birthday. This additional cost has been prioritised within this Authority, many other Authorities have allocated their resources into other areas.

Some of our schools would like to expand provision for 3 year olds, i.e. from the current half day to full day. Some schools have the space to do this but others will have to meet both staffing and building costs. Many of our 3 year olds would benefit from full time provision (or being admitted to school sooner) particularly in those areas of greater deprivation. The use of Vaseline Assessment would measure the effectiveness of this earlier/extended provision.

Any expansion taking place would need to ensure that the curriculum is appropriate i.e. based on play. Co-operation between schools and playgroup organisations is encouraged to provide additional sessions on school premises.
NEWPORT

Newport submitted a joint LEA/Early Years' Partnership Response

The value of early years education is recognised by the Partnership, a key aim of both the Early Years Development and the Childcare Plans being to ensure that all provision contributes pro-actively to the social, physical, psychological, personal and educational development of the child. In this context, the need for a holistic view of the child and quality provision which stimulates and encourages through play is considered crucial when considering an expansion of educational provision for three year olds.

Provision for three year olds in Newport is through nursery schools and units, playgroups, Meithrin, and private day nurseries.

What do Three Year Olds Need?

During their first five years children are particularly receptive learners and they need educational experiences which will foster their social, emotional, physical and intellectual growth and development. It is important that the emphasis is on constructive play and informal provision. Overly formal educational provision is not appropriate. Within any group of 3/4 year olds wide variations in development will be observed, and adults responsible for them must make themselves aware of these individual needs, and make provision for them.

It is widely agreed by experts that, when making educational provision for 3/4 year olds, consideration should be given to:

- staffing ratios
- Appropriate early years training - [teachers should have early years training and assistants should be NNEB/BTEC qualified]
- space - children need access to a large classroom and an outdoor area. Toilets and washing facilities should be nearby
- time - to cope with new routines and experiences and to work in depth without interruption. Children need time to observe, explore and to consolidate their learning
- an early years curriculum which stresses the informal aspects and which is not overly formalised. Young children need opportunities to play and talk about their experiences and this will provide the foundations for future learning. Adults working with young children should be able to demonstrate the links between well planned play provision and Desirable Outcomes
- parental involvement - in order to build on each child’s previous experience, early years staff must make close links with parents, both before the child is admitted and during the child’s time in class. Parents and staff should work closely together to support the child’s learning
- attitude to learning - children should develop their social and thinking skills to subsequently become independent learners and develop a learning disposition
High quality early years education leads to immediate and lasting social and educational benefits for all children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Poor pre-school education is almost as little use to children as none at all.

The high quality education and care enables children to enter school with a positive outlook, developed self esteem, with a commitment to learning and a belief that if they try, they can succeed. The curriculum should value and give expression to children’s different cultural needs. Early Years education is most likely to succeed where there is parental involvement.

Quality depends on a set of principles, not on a favoured type of provision. It is based on a well trained staff. The calibre and training of the professionals who work with the children are the key determiners of high quality provision. There is a need for the funding to pay for the training and the salaries of the trained staff.

Current Pattern of Educational Provision for Three Year Olds in Newport

1. In Newport there are four Nursery schools and 20 units which are funded directly by the Local Education Authority and cater for predominantly for 3-4 year olds, who attend mainly on a part-time basis, with qualified teaching staff.

2. In Newport there are 51 playgroups, 6 of which are Welsh Medium [Meithrin]. A playgroup is a group offering sessional care for two hours or more and with no session lasting more than four hours. The age range is from two and a half - five year olds. The Meithrin is defined as a group offering sessional care in the medium of Welsh, for two hours or more and with no session lasting more than four hours. They aim to provide learning experiences through structured play. The staff of both these provisions will have Pre-school Playgroup Association and/or Mudiad Ysgolian Meithrin qualifications; they may have qualified teacher input. They are registered under the Children Act. Six playgroups and two Meithrin are funded by the Local Education Authority for free part-time provision for four year olds.

3. In Newport there are 15 day nurseries. A private day nursery is a group offering part-time or full-time care depending on their parents’ needs. Day nurseries look after fives for up to the length of the adult working day. They are registered under the Children Act. One day nursery is funded by the Local Education Authority for free part-time provision for four year olds.

4. In Newport there are approx 169 childminders who may look after a number of 3 year olds. All the nursery schools and nursery units attached to schools undergo a full Estyn inspection over a period of 3/4 days every four years.

The playgroups, the Meithrin and the private day nurseries offer choice and diversity, where the Local Authority, through the Partnership will seek to support these groups, through the quality assurance and the involvement of a qualified early years teacher in all settings. The Local Authority also undertakes the monitoring and evaluation of provision funded by the Local Education Authority.

All playgroups, Meithrin and private day nurseries undergo a yearly Social Service inspection, and if funded by the Local Education Authority a 1 day Estyn inspection, which considers the provision for 3/4 year olds, for non-maintained providers.
THE EFFECT OF ADMISSIONS INTO NURSERY - at the beginning of the term after the children’s third birthday.

The following table sets out the pattern of current provision in Newport Local Education Authority schools and units and proposed additional provision that would be required for all 3 year olds to receive early years education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthday</th>
<th>Proposed admission</th>
<th>Nursery at the Present</th>
<th>Reception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>3 3 3/4 4 4/5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>3 3 3/4 4 4/5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>3 3 3/4 4 4/5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Were admission to nursery to be extended to all 3 year olds as the pattern above then Autumn born children would have five terms in the nursery, Spring born children would have four terms in the nursery and the summer term children would have only the three terms in the nursery, if the school admission policies stayed unchanged.

The net effect of this would effectively be the cost of an additional terms education for the whole cohort [say, 1800 children] which would have an additional revenue cost of £680,000.

There would be accommodation issues where nursery schools and units are currently operating at capacity.

The admission of children at three points in the year could have a detrimental effect on the continuity of the education of the existing groups. This would produce additional issues for the teaching staff.

An alternative approach would be to explore the expansion of full time 3/4 year old provision in selected settings, progressively as resources become available; or to expand half time 3 year old provision selectively, in areas of greatest need, where spaces permit. Such expansion would have to be managed in concert with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership.

There would also be a knock on effect for the existing playgroups, Meithrin, day nurseries and childminders, who currently cater for this age group.
Background Information

In the maintained sector there is no uniform pattern of educational provision for three-year-olds across Wales. The provision varies in the different authorities. Most exceed the statutory requirement for children to receive full time education from the age of five years, some provide a standard provision for all three/four year olds, others acknowledge areas of deprivation.

Pembrokeshire County Council provides high quality nursery education in twenty-three schools, catering for three-year-olds on a part time basis, and four-year-olds on a full time basis. However these units were not established on the basis of need, and although many do serve deprived areas, others are in more advantaged settings, leaving some rural and more disadvantaged areas without access to provision.

There is also one playgroup project, established in collaboration with The Pembrokeshire Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP).

The County Council are also responsible for the registration and inspection of day care services for children. Under the previous Nursery Voucher arrangements which preceded the Early Years Partnership, two registered providers were also inspected by OHMCI Wales who liaised closely with the County Council. There were also two independent schools within Pembrokeshire who were inspected by OHMCI Wales, as they provided appropriate services for under age school children.

The EYDCP, which includes Pembrokeshire County Council, is committed to working together to provide good quality childcare and early years education for all children who require it. In March 1999, the partnership completed its first childcare audit to identify detailed provision (and potential gaps in provision) across the county. (Annex 1)

Why Change?

Changes in society over the last twenty years necessitate re-evaluation of early years educational requirements to give young children opportunities to interact, make choices, discover and gain independence, all experiences which have traditionally been associated with the family unit.

- Many children are growing up in single parent families, or with a step-parent and step-siblings.

- Employment patterns affect family stability; more women are returning to the workforce or to study, and more families are experiencing the hardship of unemployment or poverty.

- Britain is becoming a diverse society, embracing many cultures, languages, religions and ethnicities

- Increasing numbers of children are experiencing childcare and early education in a variety of settings with different quality assurance procedures, some of which may be inadequate.
It is therefore necessary to educate, to promote a respect for this diversity, to counter discrimination and to promote positive attitudes to differences in people.

Legislation, curriculum initiatives, conditions of employment and qualifications have also impacted on the way early years practitioners support young children’s care and learning:

- 1988 - Education Reform Act - National Curriculum and Inspections
- 1989 - Children Act – Children Act
  - "Registration and inspection of day care services for children under 8 years of age.
  - " Compliance with Regulations’
- 1996 - Nursery education and Grant-Maintained schools Act
  - Inspection of nursery schools
  - ‘Desirable outcomes’ document
  - Expansion of 4 year old provision
- 1998 - Statutory Baseline assessment

However, these developments within the wider educational and childcare system - in relation to curriculum, assessment, inspection and teacher training - have little foundation on an understanding of how young children learn, or on existing best practice in early childhood settings, even though the value of nursery education is now accepted, a fact reinforced by a number of recent reports.

- Starting with Quality, The Rumbold Committee Report, 1990
- Start Right: The Importance of Early Learning, The Ball Report to the RSA, 1994

In addition, regular reports from the American project ‘Highscope’ and research schemes such as the NUT and Nottingham University on the results of Key Stage 1 SATs, reaffirm the advantages of good quality nursery education. In essence, children who receive good quality nursery education:

- are more likely to succeed academically: they achieve better results in SATs and GCSE
- are more likely to be employed in work with above average pay
- are less likely to be young offenders.

Good quality childcare services are also very important, and in many cases provide the only available support for families. They provide better opportunities for:

- women to return to the workforce
- young children to develop through opportunities to socialise with other children and adults
- single parents to have a break from care responsibilities
- links to be created between families and community helping to maintain local language and culture.
It is known that children’s earliest learning is rooted in their immediate environment, in their family and community. With the changing concept of the ‘family unit’ it is necessary to ensure that when very young children are in childcare/education it is quality provision.

"Care and education are inseparable - quality care is educational and quality education is caring."

The learning environment for the early years child is very different from that which is appropriate for older children. Through play they discover, and through discovery they learn. A successful practitioner will support and extend that learning.

It is unacceptable to place an early years child in an infant setting, however good, without acknowledging and providing for their special needs. It is equally unacceptable to place that child in a care setting where their development is not understood, planned for, assessed or evaluated.

Traditionally there are two interest groups, education and care. This duality is unsatisfactory and the only way forward is PARTNERSHIP.

THE WAY FORWARD

- All parents and children should have equal access to appropriate early years provision.
- The importance and significance of a “caring and supportive environment along with the positive contribution of "play" in the learning process must be recognised.
- All schools should provide uniform, appropriate provision for early years children, or be partnered with a feeder placement to ensure educational continuity and emotional security.
- All providers (statutory, private and voluntary) should have appropriate qualifications, or receive relevant training, in order to deliver the highest quality early years education.
- Quality assurance procedures should relate to the provision provided not the setting.
- There should be a single, broad nursery curriculum for early years children in all settings, addressing:
  - planning
  - resourcing and organising
  - supporting and extending learning
  - observing and recording progress
  - evaluating and adapting
  - working with parents
- A total service, through multi-agency collaboration, should provide childcare before and after school and during the holidays, health education, parenting, family literacy and crèche/care facilities for babies and toddlers.

Implications

- To standardise provision, which is currently uneven, would require significant additional funding. Promoting and supporting existing and new provisions in all sections, with emphasis on creating new opportunities in the non statutory sector, should be pursued.
- Admitting all three-year-olds into the maintained sector would require:
• additional teachers with early years training
• re-training for existing staff
• additional suitably trained support staff
• some remodelling of existing premises
• additional equipment (note, training not just for qualifications, but for "competence")

**APPROXIMATE COST IMPLICATION IN PEMBROKESHIRE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 additional teachers</td>
<td>£750,000 per annum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 support staff</td>
<td>£240,000 per annum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-training</td>
<td>£50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premises costs</td>
<td>£300,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• These costs are based on statutory sector provision. "Partnership" working with the voluntary and private sectors is more difficult to cost, but would provide opportunities for improved value for money, both on provision and training for providers in all sectors.
• Where no provision exists in a local school or in small schools where appropriate provision cannot be provided, and cost prohibits full-scale change, any local approved early years group must receive sufficient subsidy to provide the service free of charge, in partnership with the local school.
• In rural areas where very small schools would not be able to provide appropriate provision, and private provision would not be viable, a central area resource with transport provided, or a travelling play/education bus, should be considered.
• The most important element must be to ensure desirable outcomes for children, by whatever means - but integrating care, education and play – to suit the needs of individual children.

**References**

Building Excellent Schools Together (BEST)
Welsh Office White Paper, 1998

*Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning Before Compulsory School Age*
ACCAC, 1996

*Early Years Services and the Assembly*
Plaid Cymru Document, 1999
Quality in Diversity in Early Learning
Early Childhood Education Forum, 1998
Annex 1

Extract from EYDCP Audit – March 1999

Number of 3 and 4 year olds in maintained provision (Jan 1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total No. of 3 yr olds</th>
<th>Total No. of 4 yr olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>680</td>
<td>729</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.6

Number of 3 and 4 year olds in part-time education (Jan 1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishment</th>
<th>Under 4s</th>
<th>4 year olds</th>
<th>5 year olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playgroup Project</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintained Nursery Units</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.7

Number of 3 and 4 year olds in full-time education (Jan 1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishment</th>
<th>Under 4s</th>
<th>4 year olds</th>
<th>5 year olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playgroup Project</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintained Nursery Units</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.8

Note: In the Playgroup Project, 26 children attend morning nursery sessions of which 21 also attend funded playgroup in the afternoons; five children are therefore in part-time education.

Number of 2, 3 and 4 year olds attending Maintained Infant/Primary Schools (Jan 1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Full-Time</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1365</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 9
Number of 2, 3 and 4 year olds attending maintained Nursery School (Jan 1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Full-Time</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.11

Number of 2, 3 and 4 year olds accessing Private Provision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishment</th>
<th>2 yr olds</th>
<th>3 yr olds</th>
<th>4 yr olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherwood School</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steiner School</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haylett Grange</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.12

Number of children attending Day Nurseries (non-maintained sector)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 2</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – 3</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 4</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total*</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.13

* excluding 2 nurseries – data not available at time of audit.

Number of children attending Playgroup Provision (non-maintained sector)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>0 – 2</th>
<th>2 – 3</th>
<th>3 – 4</th>
<th>4+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Pembs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Pembs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>767</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.14
• there are a possible further 80 places available to children which are not accounted for above – data not available at time of audit.

Childminder Provision within Pembrokeshire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Total Number of childminders</th>
<th>Places available for 0 - 5 year olds</th>
<th>Places available for 5 - 7 year olds</th>
<th>Total places available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kilgetty</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saundersfoot</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narberth</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembroke Dock</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembroke</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenby</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishguard</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neyland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llandissilio</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crymych</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haverfordwest</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Trends

2.2.1 Since local government re-organisation in 1996, the authority has closed one nursery school, opened three attached nursery units and supported collaborative arrangements between the maintained and private sectors to expand provision under the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan 1999 – 2000. Twenty primary schools are currently seeking to extend the age range for which they provide in order to accommodate an additional 150 – 180 estimated places in the longer term. The authority has also proposed the closure of its remaining nursery school, to be amalgamated with a neighbouring primary school.

2.2.2 The EYDCP Audit identified the following provision of places in the non-maintained sector:

- Registered Playgroups - 767 places available
- Registered Day Nurseries - 244 fte places available
- Out of School Childcare - 280 places
- Holiday Clubs - 377 places
- Registered Childminders - 498 places
- Registered Afterschools - 131 places
- Registered Holiday Play Care - 526 places

The current trend shows a fall in the numbers of children attending playgroups as more children were entering the maintained sector earlier. This could render some playgroups less viable in the longer term. EYDCP wishes to give consideration to supporting existing playgroups to operate on
school premises, thus developing a continuum of provision and enabling schools and playgroups to work collaboratively.

It was also noted in the Audit that, whilst playgroup and day nursery provision appeared plentiful, the introduction of Working Families Tax Credit later this year might increase demand for Registered Childcare.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Number</th>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Ages of Pupils</th>
<th>Numbers of Pupils attending Nursery Units / Nursery Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>PT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001</td>
<td>Pembroke Dock Nursery</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2212</td>
<td>Goodwick CP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2214</td>
<td>Fenton CP Infants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2216</td>
<td>Prendergast CP Infants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2220</td>
<td>Johnston CP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2236</td>
<td>Hakin CP Infants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2246</td>
<td>Albion Square Infants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2251</td>
<td>St Davids CP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2258</td>
<td>Saundersfoot CP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2265</td>
<td>The Meads CP Infants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2267</td>
<td>Mount Airey CP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2268</td>
<td>Monkton CP Infants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2276</td>
<td>The Mount CP Infants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2277</td>
<td>Neyland CP Infants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2279</td>
<td>Fishguard CP Infants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2383</td>
<td>Ysgol Glan Cleddau</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3042</td>
<td>Manorbier VC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3051</td>
<td>Stackpole VC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3052</td>
<td>Tenby VC Infants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3054</td>
<td>Letterston VC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3057</td>
<td>Hubberston VC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3312</td>
<td>St Mary’s RC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3313</td>
<td>Mary Immaculate RC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3319</td>
<td>St Teilo’s RC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 10
POWYS

Powys submitted a joint Early Year Partnership / LEA response
(please see page 86 in the next section)
The educational and developmental value of early years education (including that for three year olds) is very great. In order to ensure that the potential value is maximised, provision needs to reflect certain major principles. These include:

- the fact that children are active learners
- they learn best through first hand experience
- they need many opportunities for play and talk
- the context and process of learning (the where and how) is just as important as what children learn.

Educational provision should reflect the desirable outcomes for children’s learning and should include provision for the development of children’s knowledge, understanding and skill in the 6 areas of learning:

- personal and social development
- language and literacy
- mathematics
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development

Quality of provision is, therefore, the essential issue. The Rhondda Cynon Taff Early Years Partnership has identified this as a central feature of its Plan and intends to establish agreed quality standards across all settings. At present the OHMCI inspection report "Standards and Quality in the Early Years" published earlier this year is of relevance as it includes in its main findings the following statement “The overall quality of educational provision for four-year-olds continues to improve. It is satisfactory or better in around 85% of early years settings in the maintained sector, and about 55% of playgroups and nurseries in the non-maintained sector”.

This would suggest that currently the educational needs of young children are better that at settings in the maintained sector and would re-inforce the importance of the approach of RCT to work towards agreed standards.

For all young children, but especially for 3 year olds, the regime must be appropriate and not constrained by a rigid, too formal approach which can negate opportunities for play, exploration and child focussed ideas. When the provision for very young children is appropriate, the centrality of positive attitudes to learning, play, social development and communication combine to ensure high value from the educational experience.
With reference to the cost and effect of expansion, the issue in this authority has always been to ensure equitable provision is an LEA where historically there has been provision for 3 year olds in some areas. Expansion has reflected demand although further development would need to consider the needs and expressed preferences of parents.

These may well be influenced by financial considerations - a free full time (20 hours per week) place offered at a maintained school is likely to be more attractive than a setting of fewer (or the same) hours at a non-maintained setting for which payment is required.

It is clear that increased provision for 3 year olds in the maintained sector can result in a reduction in playgroup provision. National and local policies will need to reconcile the pressures of increased governing body responsibility and the financial issues of Fair Funding and LMS. In the context of long term development this would require changes of emphasis within both the maintained and private/voluntary sector.

The over-riding issue, however, must be the quality of provision.
1 The Developmental and Educational Value of Providing Education for Three Year Olds

1.1 Definition of a Three Year Old

1.1.1 For the purpose of this consultation, a child will be a three-year-old from the beginning of the term after his/her third birthday.

1.2 The Early Years

1.2.1 This period of childhood is very important for future learning. Children are developing very fast and have the potential to make great strides. Learning during this developmental stage is, however, vulnerable to unsuitable environments and experiences. There is well-documented evidence that an inappropriate curriculum and organisation can impair later learning. An expansion of education to include three-year-olds will need to be very carefully planned to ensure that the provision is of good quality and appropriate to the children’s needs.

1.3 Parents as First Educators

1.3.1 Parents are the most valuable source of education for their children. The initiative must ensure that parent partnerships are developed and the role of parents is valued.

1.4 Curriculum

1.4.1 "The Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning before Compulsory School Age" is used, at present, as the basis of a curriculum for four-year-olds and represents the desired end product for the year. The "outcomes" format means that settings sometimes focus on the product rather than the process of education and fail to take into consideration how children of this age learn. It will be important for the development of three-year-olds that they are not included in over formal work towards these outcomes. There should be a thorough debate about the way young children learn and what is expected of the proposed education and the very important role of emotional maturity and social competence should play a part in the discussion.

1.5 Quality Staff

1.5.1 Many of the teachers in maintained settings are not "early years’ specialists" and there are few teachers being trained for this area of education. It is important that an extension of education is accompanied by an extension of both initial and in-service training for early years’ teachers.

1.5.2 The quality of the adult–child interactions is very important for learning in the early years. Many non-maintained settings attain provider status by the involvement of a teacher in their planning process. This may not have an influence on the quality of the interactions. All staff involved with young children will need to be involved in very good training to develop their skills.
1.5.3 The staff available for the education of four-year-olds is, at present, far from ideal. Adding three-year-olds may mean that good practice is not spread at a sufficient pace to ensure quality.

1.6 Adult-Child Ratios

1.6.1 The effectiveness of early education depends upon the quality of the adult interventions. At present maintained nurseries have a ratio of 1:13 and for this is probably too high to allow for optimum interventions. The ratios for three-year-olds will need to be considered for the policy to be effective.

1.7 Summer Born Children

Research evidence suggests that our present systems disadvantages summer born children throughout their schooling. If the present arrangements are continued and most rising 5s (ie children who will be five throughout the year) commence in reception classes together; summer born children might be further disadvantaged by the fact that they will have received two terms less education than their autumn born peers.

1.8 Accommodation

1.8.1 Young children need space and resources for appropriate provision. Access to the outdoors encourages physical development, co-operative play and an understanding of the wider environment. Many voluntary settings are working very hard with very few resources, in cramped and difficult conditions. Extra revenue into this sector could help to develop facilities but there also may need to be some support with capital costs.

1.8.2 Home based opportunities for co-operative and physical play have decreased over the years. Increased traffic has made streets dangerous and many playgrounds are vandalised. Extra opportunities for play will be beneficial.

1.9 Early Intervention

1.9.1 There is a growing body of evidence that early intervention is beneficial to children with special educational needs. Education for three-year-olds will give early access and should help later achievement.

1.10 Social Exclusion

1.10.1 The "Sure Start" programme aims to provide good quality play opportunities to the children of the poorest communities. The Torfaen Childcare Audit 1999 identified a lack of playgroups and cylchoedd meithrin in the strategy areas of Torfaen and interviews conducted for the "Sure Start" plan found that the groups are not seen as welcoming by some parents. Programmes such as Head Start have shown the effectiveness of early education for children with limited pre-school experiences and the initiative could compliment the "Sure Start" programme and help towards its sustainability.
1.11 The Status of Early Years

1.11.1 The proposed initiative will help towards the creation of a distinct "Early Years" phase of education. This will be helpful in stimulating a debate about what is quality for this vital period.

2. The Effect on Childcare Providers

2.1 Private Day Nurseries

2.1.1 All but one of the Private Day Nurseries in Torfaen are registered to be providers of Education for Four Year Olds. If that registration is extended to include Education for Three Year Olds it seems likely that these settings will benefit from parents choosing the option of integrated education and childcare. Childcare tax credits should also increase the demand for places.

2.2 Playgroups and Cylchoedd Meithrin

2.2.1 At present, two cylch meithrin and one playgroup are registered as providers of Education for Four Year Olds, with one playgroup and one cylch undergoing registration. It seems likely that these groups would benefit from the initiative.

2.2.2 For the groups not registered for education the effects are uncertain. Torfaen has a long tradition of offering a part-time nursery place to three-year-olds. In September 1998, 87% of the borough’s three year olds took up a nursery place. Many children do not attend a playgroup or cylch meithrin prior to starting nursery. There will, however, be some autumn and spring born children who attend a voluntary setting at present but who, if they are offered a free maintained nursery place earlier, may accept this in favour of the place at the voluntary setting. Balancing this is the fact that Childcare Tax Credits should increase the demand for places.

2.3 Childminders

2.3.1 Childminders in Torfaen have many spare places at present. A part-time nursery place does not usually enable carers to undertake employment without extra childcare. Many parents use childminders to wrap around a nursery place. Childcare tax credit should also increase the demand for childminders.

3. The Cost of Expansion

3.1 Pupil Numbers

3.1.1 Pupil numbers for the 2000/2001 would suggest that 668 extra places would be needed to provide education places for three year olds in Torfaen. During that year LEA provision will also be 36 places short of providing for the children who will be eligible under the present admissions policy. This would suggest that 704 places are needed.

3.1.2 Places will, however, be available in the non-maintained settings. At present there are seven providers registered and three providers undergoing registration.
3.2 Costs

3.2.1 An expansion on this scale will require both extra staff and some capital development. Initial calculations would suggest that the extra staff will cost an extra £500,000 per year and capital costs will be in the region of £500,000 for each of the next two years. These figures are, however, only initial calculations and may have to be revised in light of more detailed consideration.
VALE OF GLAMORGAN

a) The Educational and Developmental value of Early years Education for three year olds

The Vale of Glamorgan Council is committed to the development of high quality educational provision for three year olds. Many three year olds within the Vale of Glamorgan already benefit from such high quality, accessible provision within the Authority’s nursery schools and units. However, most nursery schools and units have a waiting list.

The principles informing this LEA’s action.

Programmes are informed by much research evidence showing that high quality early childhood education can have a significant and long term effect on children’s learning, can lead to gains in educational achievement throughout schooling and can lead to better social behaviour and more productive citizenship. (Sylva 1993, Schweinhart and Weikart 1993).

Children within the Vale of Glamorgan nursery schools and units are offered a broad and balanced curriculum, receiving a wide variety of experiences through activities that build appropriately on their existing abilities, enabling quality learning to take place. The children’s cognitive and social development is part of this curriculum. There is also a recognition of the value of the contribution which parents/carers make to their child’s education and a working partnership is encouraged.

The curriculum in the LEA’s early years provision is flexible to meet individual needs, as children develop and learn at different rates, but is delivered within the framework of Desirable Outcomes for Learning, which provides a springboard for learning through both structured and spontaneous play. Planning provides clear educational purpose, with learning experiences planned and organised with specific learning objectives in mind. This structured approach to learning therefore enhances the development of the children’s knowledge, understanding and skills.

Quality is ensured by the employment of qualified, well trained staff. The LEA recognises the importance of training in order that teachers and other staff effectively deliver high quality educational provision for the children in our care. A wide range of inservice training for Early years teachers and staff through centrally run courses and through cluster meetings. A number of courses are accredited and enable participants to obtain additional qualifications as identified through the Authority’s continued programme for life long learning. This offers opportunities for staff at all stages of their career in early years to have access to appropriate qualifications and training.

b) The cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers

The proposed expansion of three year olds will incur increased costs in both revenue and capital terms, e.g. as associated to inspection, staffing, buildings and resources. In planning through the Early Years Partnership, capacity has been adapted to meet the present demand as well as likely future needs.
There will be a need to fund the cost of purpose built nursery units within maintained settings. The estimated cost is in excess of £1 million.

The issues around registration (Social Services) and Inspection (Estyn) will need clarification if dual inspection/registration costs are to be avoided. The ratio of staff to children under 8 differ between social services (1:8) and education (1:13) but these ratios will impact on the numbers of staff required.

There will be a need for schools to fund age-appropriate resources. The estimated cost of funding both staff (based on the ratio of 1:13) and resources is expected to exceed £634,000.

It is recognised that when extension of provision takes place, it is important that early year/childcare services/agencies across the Authority work in a climate of collaboration, cooperation and mutual respect in order to meet the needs of children and parents/carers in the Vale of Glamorgan.
WREXHAM

Wrexham Submitted a joint Early Year Partnership / LEA response

(1) INTRODUCTION

We welcome the opportunity to submit comments on early years education provision for 3 year olds. Providers in all sectors have long recognised the importance and value of early years education as long as it is provided in an environment of play and care. The County Borough Council has been committed to supporting quality early years provision not only by direct provision of its own (by using monies from the statutory sector element of the education budget), but also by grant funding to voluntary bodies. Historically this has been from Education and Social Services.

(2) CURRENT PATTERN OF PROVISION

The current pattern of provision for 3 year olds in Wrexham County Borough is as follows:

2.1. Maintained Sector

Since April 1997 all children who are 3 years old by 31st August in any year are offered a half-time place in a maintained nursery school or class if their parents want it. There are approximately 1,460 children (97%) currently accessing this provision in Wrexham schools.

2.2. Wales PPA Playgroups

There are currently 63 playgroups including 16 playgroup plus in the County Borough. All are registered with the local authority Social Services Department and provide 1,508 places for children from two and a half to five years of age. One has also been inspected by an OHMCI (ESTYN) nursery education inspector. Playgroups provide between two and five sessions per week. Sessions vary from two to three and a half hours duration. There are approximately 900 three year olds currently attending Wales PPA playgroups in Wrexham County Borough.

2.3. MYM Playgroups

There are currently 13 playgroups including 5 playgroup plus offering Welsh medium provision in the County Borough. They are registered to provide 343 places for children from two and a half to five years of age. MYM Playgroups offer between two and five sessions per week of between two and three and a half hours duration. Approximately 135 three year olds currently attend MYM Playgroups in the County Borough.

2.4. Private Day Nurseries

Private nursery provision is available for children whose parents choose to pay for a private setting. In Wrexham County Borough there are 21 privately run day nurseries which are registered by the local authority Social Services Department, four of which have been inspected by an OHMCI (ESTYN) registered nursery education inspector. Three day nurseries are also registered as private nursery schools. There is one sessional Montessori Nursery. Some private day nurseries employ a qualified teacher but have not sought registration as a private nursery school. Private day nurseries
provide 762 places for children from 0-8 years of age. Approximately 220 three year olds currently attend private provision either full-time or part-time.

2.5. Childminders

A number of 3 year olds are placed with childminders whilst their parents take up work and training opportunities. There are currently 83 childminders registered by the local authority Social Services Department. They are registered to provide 391 places for children from 0-8 in the County Borough. Approximately 54 three year olds are currently placed with childminders.

(3) Childminders, day nurseries and playgroups are registered and inspected by the local authority Social Services Department to monitor the standard of the childcare they provide. There is not however a separate, formalised assessment of the educative content of the care they provide.

In order to address this, Quality Assurance Schemes are currently being introduced by the National Childminding Association, National Day Nurseries Association, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin and Wales Pre-school Playgroups Association.

(4) There is considerable concern that some 3 year olds attend several different settings in a day such as:-
- a before school club, childminder or day nursery from 8.00 -9.00 a.m.
- a playgroup plus, nursery class or day nursery from 9-11.30 a.m.
- a playgroup plus, nursery class or day nursery from 11.30 - 3.00 p.m.
- an after school club, childminder or day nursery from 3.00 - 5.00/ 6.00 p.m.

(5) Any count of places for children in these settings will be affected by the potential for overlap/combined use of services:-

5.1. A number of parents surveyed as part the Childcare Audit in March 1999 commented that they would like more ‘wrap around’ care to be provided for nursery children in schools, whereby children attend nursery in the morning and playgroup plus in the afternoon. Whatever type of complementary provision is offered the needs of the child must be paramount, particularly if there is to be an expansion of this type of provision. Whatever the setting the importance of play and active learning must not be overlooked.

5.2. The majority of playgroup plus groups in Wrexham County Borough offer this type of ‘wrap around care’ in schools (3 in community centres), but not all operate every weekday. Some day nurseries and childminders also offer this type of provision and provide transport to pick up children from and take children to schools. If this type of provision is to be extended care must be taken to ensure that service providers work together to provide consistency for the children.

5.3 There is some provision now in the maintained sector whereby children attend a nursery class in the morning and a playgroup plus group in the afternoon. The same members of staff in the same setting are responsible for this provision, giving the children more continuity and stability. Many parents would prefer to leave their children in one setting for the whole day. A number of parents would prefer to leave their 3 year olds with the childminder or day nursery they have
been with since babies, but the cost is prohibitive. Parents can only be offered real choices for their 3 year olds if provision in all settings is free.

(6) The small class size initiative aimed at reducing class sizes to a maximum of 30 pupils has not made it any easier on nursery and reception classes for parents to have the school of their choice and it has been necessary for some parents to accept their second choice. The local authority is encouraging schools to set up early years units which have nursery and reception classes together in one unit, which alleviates this difficulty. However, some providers prefer 3 and 4 year olds to be separated.

(7) VIEWS ON TWO DISTINCT ELEMENTS OF THE REMIT

7.1. The educational and developmental value of early years education for 3 year olds.

We believe there is huge developmental value in education for 3 year olds as they have a right to quality assured holistic education with an appropriate curriculum, in an appropriate setting with appropriately trained and qualified staff.

7.2. The cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers.

It is not clear what is meant by the 'cost of expansion'. Does it mean expansion of educational provision within the maintained sector? The remit is totally to do with education not childcare. We therefore do not see the relevance of the impact on childcare providers. All settings provide childcare but not all provide education.

(8) If there is to be an expansion in the provision of early years education for 3 year olds, the shortfall in current provision needs to be addressed first. The maintained sector currently offers half-time education in a nursery class or school for all 3 year olds whose parents want this. All 5 MYM playgroup plus groups provide half-time education for 5 sessions a week.

To enable the existing 16 Wales PPA playgroup plus groups to provide half-time education for 5 sessions per week, an additional 24 sessions would be required. The cost of this would be approximately £11,000 based on 16 children paying fees of £2.00 per session. If every nursery class in every school (60) was to provide playgroup plus sessions to complement provision in the nursery class, the cost would be much higher.

(9) The cost of expansion within the maintained sector would place a new burden on the local authority. The LEA already provides .5 provision for 3 year olds which places an enormous strain on the education budget. At the present time, to provide .5 provision the cost is £1,020,000. To expand this provision to full time for 3 year olds would cost £2,040,000 using existing resources. It needs to be recognised that any expansion of provision within the local authority should look at supporting the .5 provision currently on offer in the County Borough.

(10) The expansion of educational provision for 3 year olds within the private sector could be achieved through the provision of funding for more day nurseries to register with OHMCI (ESTYN) and supporting the funding of places within day nurseries. The expansion of
educational provision for 3 year olds within the childminding sector could be achieved by funding the development of the NCMA Approved Childminding Networks Scheme, ‘Children Come First’ and by the funding of childcare places with childminders.

(11) Impact on Childcare Providers

11.1. Playgroups

The impact on playgroups would be significant if 3 year olds as well as 4 year olds were to be offered free full-time provision. If more playgroups were to close, parent/toddler provision would be affected and parenting support and training opportunities for many parents would be lost.

11.2. Private Day Nurseries

Many private day nurseries would no longer be viable if they were to lose their 3 year olds to other settings. Many would close unless funding could be provided to enable parents of 3 year olds to access free provision in day nurseries. If more were to close, parental choice would be diminished.

11.3. Childminders

Registered childminders provide one of the most important sources of formal childcare in Wales. In many rural areas of Wrexham County Borough childminders are the only childcare available. The number of childminders in the County Borough is declining. A campaign to recruit more childminders has been undertaken by Wrexham Childcare Partnership. If childminders were to lose 3 year olds to other settings as well as 4 year olds, many of them would no longer be able to run a viable service.

12) There is a contradiction in the remit, ‘childcare below compulsory school age’ i.e. below the age of 5, which includes 4 year olds, whereas the remit is concerned with 3 year olds. Also some clarification of what is meant by 3 year olds is needed. Does it mean 3 year olds/rising 4’s or the younger 3 year olds who attend settings for the younger age range? Intake into local authority nursery classes/schools varies widely throughout Wales.

(13) Conclusion

The proposal to expand education provision for 3 year olds raises many complex issues. Expansion of provision may not be in the best interests of the child. Any proposed change must ensure that the child’s needs are paramount and that parents are provided with real choices. Three year olds should not be considered as a discrete group. The development of early years services for young children must take into account the holistic needs of children.

Children’s needs may be met by differing means and in differing settings provided that quality standards are maintained therein. The importance of appropriate early years experiences for children, whatever the setting, must be at the heart of any proposed policy changes.
All providers of services for young children in the statutory, private and voluntary sectors must work in partnership in order to attain the very best for children who are our future.
BRIDGENE EARLY YEAR PARTNERSHIP

The positive impact of early years education on children’s development is recognised by the Bridgend Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. However, support for universal extension to all three year olds is based on the assumption that:

- the provision is sufficiently flexible and individually child-centred to ensure that the delivery of early years education meets each child’s particular needs;
- children’s care needs are always paramount; and
- there is parental choice in terms of the content, amount and setting of the provision

The Bridgend Early Years Development and Childcare Plans have at their foundations the common aim of providing the maximum opportunity for parents and children to make an informed choice regarding early years education. To achieve this aim it is necessary to maintain the broadest range of high quality provision across the whole of the County Borough. This includes LEA nursery schools and classes; private nurseries; playgroups; and childminding networks, requiring parity of funding across the spectrum of placements and promoting diversity through strategic planning and active encouragement of the different sectors. These services must be underpinned by a network of out of school care and learning and a strategy to develop parenting capacity within families. You will be aware that playgroups are under extreme pressure at this time and that nationally many are closing because of declining viability – despite our best efforts this pattern is to a lesser extent replicated in Bridgend County Borough. Therefore, in developing a framework and financial arrangements for early years education for three year olds it is essential that:

- the arrangement take account of the need to maintain and further develop rich diversity of early years and childcare; and
- parents and children can access the best combination of childcare and education setting that meet their and the children’s needs at any given time

The definition of a ‘three year old’ must be clear, unequivocal and easily understood by parents and professionals. It must be seen as fair and equitable as it is applied to accessing resources. the determination of when a child might be eligible for funded provision must ensure the least differentiation based on the random accident of birth dates, therefore:

- the principle that children should have equality of opportunity requires that arrangements for accessing early years education should minimise the potential for different ages for eligibility.

The requirement to extend universal early years education must be fully costed and properly financed. It is estimated that the cost of expansion to enable this LEA to provide for universal access to a full time early years education place in the setting preferred by parents for the year prior to starting full-time schooling is approximately £1.5M. It is clear that resources must be made available to ensure that:
• providers direct costs are met at levels that ensures viable, sustainable provision;
• funds are identified for infrastructure support – development, setting and raising standards, training and monitoring – are made available;
• there is a capacity for compensatory support for children and communities in need; and
• the allocation of funds across County Boroughs takes account of disparities in existing provision arising out of authority’s pre-LGR revenue commitments and education estate.

(The Committee may be interested in a report on ‘Nursery Education’ that was recently submitted to the Education Committee of the Council. This is attached as additional information)

We are concerned that any initiatives to increase formal provision for pre-school children should not have a de-skilling effect and undermine parental confidence in terms of their parenting capacity and responsibilities. It is therefore necessary that the arrangements for launching and promoting the proposals are linked with a broader strategy to consolidate and raise the profile and capacity of parents as primary carers and educators.
BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MONDAY, 12TH JULY 1999

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, LEISURE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7

SUBJECT: NURSERY EDUCATION

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members of the current pattern of provision for nursery education in the county borough, and to consider the need for a strategy to address the present inequality of access to nursery education.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Current Provision

Each year there are approximately 1550 children who will commence their full-time schooling for the first time as a ‘rising 5’, i.e. in the school year in which they have their fifth birthday (between 1st September and the following 31st August). No matter where children live in the county borough, a full-time place is available, and for the vast majority, this place is in their local school. In other words, there is universal access for all children of this age. However, in the year prior to this, the picture is a very much different one: there is no universal access to early years education.

There is at present a mixed economy of provision both in terms of types of providers – LEA maintained nursery schools and nursery classes, playgroups and private nurseries, and also in the extent of provision be it full- or part-time. Approximately two thirds of the cohort of 3-4 year olds (over 1000 children) receive nursery education in the maintained sector, with roughly half getting full-time provision the other half, part-time. The remaining third, about 550 children, are either in playgroups or private nurseries, with childminders or relative/family friends or at home with parent(s). In some areas of the county borough, there is either very limited access or none at all.

There are six LEA-maintained nursery schools funded centrally by the LEA and, therefore, not subject to the Local Management of Schools scheme. They are located in: Caerau, Nantymoel, Pontycymmer, Pencoed, Sarn, and Ogmore Vale, providing either full or part-time nursery education for just over 250 children.
The '1979' Number

The present arrangements for funding nursery education in some Infant and Primary schools is based on a formula that relates to the level of provision that existed in 1979, when the programme of nursery expansion effectively ceased in the former Mid Glamorgan. This has been a source of increasing concern among some schools, and one that needs to be urgently addressed if the principles of "Fair Funding" are to be followed. This concern is particularly evident, of course, in those schools and communities where there has been no free nursery education available.

Difficult budget settlements since local government re-organisation, leading to cuts in various parts of the education services, have prevented any growth in provision. The introduction of the Nursery Voucher Scheme in 1997 by the previous government led to £1.7m being top-sliced from the Education budget to pay for places for four year olds, the majority of whom were already receiving some form of early years education already. In 1998 the incoming Labour government dismantled the Nursery Voucher scheme and replaced it with Early Years Partnerships, requiring local authorities to take responsibility for securing free, early years education places for all eligible four year olds [a child becomes eligible the term after his/her fourth birthday]. In September 1998, the local authority’s Early Years Development Plan was approved by the Secretary of State, part of which states that action will be taken to secure equality of access for all 3-4 year olds to free early years education. The government is requiring that the development of early years education should be in partnership with other providers. The newly extended Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership has been considering a vision for the provision of early years education in the county borough. The following statement has found support within the Partnership: “All ‘rising 4’ children should have the opportunity of a free, full-time, quality early years education place in a setting preferred by parents”. The Partnership is now proposing to consult further by seeking the views of parents.

3.0 KEY REPORTS ON NURSERY EDUCATION

3.1 District Audit: "Services to Under-fives in Bridgend County Borough" (1997)

In 1997, District Audit reported on "Service to Under-Fives in Bridgend County Borough" and highlighted three main issues that the Authority was asked to consider:

- the high level of nursery school places which have a substantial cost implication compared with nursery classes
- the variation between full-time and part-time places which has implications for equal opportunities for all
- the apparent inequality of provision in different areas of the county borough

It concluded its report by stating: "The Authority supports a broad range of services for the under-fives and is a high provider of education places, although within this provision there are large differences between areas of Bridgend. We consider that you have gone some way towards meeting you aim of providing the opportunity of a maintained education place for three year plus children, although the level of nursery class provision is relatively low. Within this scenario the Authority has high
levels of nursery school places. This has a substantial cost implication since it is an expensive form of provision compared with nursery classes. The proportion of places that are full-time as compared with part-time is also high, which has implications as regards providing equal opportunities for all ... We consider that the Council should analyse supply and demand by area throughout the County Borough as a pre-requisite for the future planning of places”.

**Audit Commission Reports**

In 1996, the Audit Commission published “Under Five Count”, a Management Handbook on the Education of Children Under Five, it recommended that:

- local authorities should devise strategies for under-fives education that start with the needs of children, rather than with the existing pattern of provision
- that policies should be designed to produce a level of entitlement that matches the resources available
- local authorities should consider all possible options for improving access and quality – not just the option of expanding their own nursery education provision; and
- steps should be taken to ensure that local authority provision is used efficiently.

In November 1997, an update on the above report was published entitled, "Counting to Five" which set out three major issues for local authorities to address:

- access to services was uneven, varying from one authority to another and from place to place within an authority
- the educational quality of individual settings (schools, playgroups, private nurseries etc.) varied, although
- all types of provider could do well; and
- costs were variable, both within and between different types of setting, with no evidence of a link between quality and cost. The key factors affecting costs were found to be staff pay and levels of occupancy.

It went on to report that: "Nursery schools cost, on average, 50% more than nursery classes, but few authorities have reviewed their provision or considered making better use of these facilities by expanding nursery schools’ role. Authorities should reassess the role of nursery schools. If they are to be retained, authorities should consider using them as facilities for training early years workers and as resources centres for local providers, including those from the private and voluntary sectors, to justify their additional cost and to support the authority’s early years strategy.”

Above all, the Audit Commission has stressed the importance of focusing on the needs of parents and children, and of meeting those needs through a mix of provision/ Local Authorities need to work in partnership with providers in the voluntary and private sectors to ensure a co-ordinated approach to services for children under five.

In its final chapter, the Audit Commission identifies seven key messages emerging:

- Think strategically;
- Work with others;
- Secure appropriate provision;
• Involve parents;
• Focus on quality;
• Use resources efficiently; and
• See planning as a process.

4.0 AUDIT OF NURSERY SCHOOL PROVISION IN THE COUNTY BOROUGH

4.1 Taking account of the recommendations from District Audit and the Audit Commission, and mindful of the inequality of access to nursery education, work has been undertaken by officers, since those reports were published, to consider the relative costs of nursery education as provided by nursery schools and nursery classes. The results echo the main conclusions of the auditors, and are set out below.

Nursery Schools
The total budget for all six nursery schools in 1998-99 was £632k. The number of pupils attending either full, or part-time in January 1998 were 296, of which 178 (60%) were full-time, and 118 (40%) were part-time. Based on these figures, the funding per pupil for nursery schools was approximately £2,666 per full-time equivalent pupil.

Nursery Classes
Nursery classes in Infant or Primary schools are funded through the LMS formula. Schools will receive an allocation based on pupil numbers and the age of the child. The values of the Age-Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) for 1998/99 were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>AWPU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 4's</td>
<td>£1514.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 5’s</td>
<td>£1274.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to this funding schools also receive funding for such things as rates, energy, building maintenance and cleaning etc. This funding is not bases upon pupil numbers or ages. Based upon the actual number of pupils funded, the funding per pupil for non-pupil related factors equates to £346 per pupil. This brings the total funding per pupil per age group to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>AWPU</th>
<th>Non-pupil Funding</th>
<th>Total Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 4s</td>
<td>£1514.30</td>
<td>£346</td>
<td>£1860.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 5s</td>
<td>£1274.21</td>
<td>£346</td>
<td>£1620.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident that the funding per pupil in a nursery school is significantly higher than the funding per pupil in a nursery class, by as much as over £800 per pupil. Given the present inequality of access and provision for a significant proportion of children, can this higher level of funding be justified?
5.0 CORE VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

5.1 Members will be mindful that one of the core values of the council is "to ensure equality of access and provision". Furthermore, 2 of the guiding principles of education, leisure and community services are "entitlement and equity". It will be important that we begin to demonstrate that there is a strategy in place to achieve this in such a key area of our service provision.

6.0 A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

6.1 With the above values and principles already in place, it will be important to describe a vision for early years education in the county borough. The vision that, at present, appears to find support is the one put forward by the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership:

"All 'rising 4' children [ie those children who attain the age of 4 between 1 September and 31 August] should have the opportunity of a free, full-time, quality early years education place in a setting preferred by parents".

The duty of Best Value will need to be demonstrated in ensuring effective, efficient and economic delivery of services. Consultation will be essential to determine whether parents would support such a vision. Clearly, there are many issues that will have to be addressed before such a vision can be realised. They include:

- Identification of the full revenue and capital cost implications
- Staffing implications
- The effects on the LEA's admission policy
- Changes to the LEA's formula funding scheme
- Impact on Infant Class Size Reduction plans
- Role of nursery schools
- Effect on the overall quality of early years education
- Impact on meeting needs of children and families
- Impact on the mixed economy of provision.

A strategy for action will need to include proposals for the future funding of early years education and the future of the nursery schools, if such a vision is to be achieved, in partnership with others. Much work has already been undertaken with regard to nursery schools, and various options for their future are under consideration which includes:

a. Do nothing. Continue to maintain the 6 nursery schools and meet full costs.

b. Close all nursery schools and transfer provision to nearby Infant and Primary schools. This, of course, will be subject to public notice and statutory consultation procedures.

c. Expand the role of all nursery schools.

d. A combination of B and C above; ie, close some nursery schools and transfer provision, and expand role of others.

A survey of Infant and Primary schools is also needed to assess the potential impact if the present arrangements of funding nursery education, ie, according to the "1979 Number" were to change. Information is required on the likely demand for places, availability of suitable
accommodation, and staffing arrangements etc, and at the same time consult on the proposed vision for early years as described above. It is planned to carry out this survey before the end of the summer term 1999, with a view to preparing a further report at a future meeting of this committee.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that members note the content of this report on the current pattern of nursery education and await a further report on a strategy to work towards achieving equality of access to quality early years’ education for all children in the county borough.
CONWY EARLY YEAR PARTNERSHIP

Response to Policy on Early Years Education Provision for 3 year olds
(Pre-16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee)

Conwy Early Years Development Plan states that 3 year olds attend maintained schools on a .5 basis from the September after their 3rd birthday. This provision is available in all maintained Primary and Infant schools within the County Borough of Conwy. The Plan is reviewed annually. The Partnership values and support a variety of provision for children prior to their admission to part-time schooling and would wish to see this continued.

Response to specific elements of the remit:

(a) The educational and developmental value of early years education for 3 years olds

The rising 3 year olds and younger 3 year olds not attending school benefit from an informal setting with play based activities and higher child:adult ratios. This allows each child to develop at his/her own pace prior to school admission and allows parents to choose flexible session attendance to meet the needs of the child.

The Conwy Partnership support this continuum from informal to gradual formal early years education.

(b) The cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers

The Conwy Partnership welcomes the continuation of the status quo in Conwy which at present has no additional cost for children entering school the September after their third birthday. The Partnership would welcome guaranteed funding to secure good quality pre-school provision with the emphasis on play based developmental experiences. The strengthening of this provision would be extremely cost effective.
DENBIGHSHIRE EARLY YEAR PARTNERSHIP

a) Early years education has to be defined before you can place a value on it, education as defined by a parent is quite different to what an early years teacher may call education or a lay person for that matter. What are we to place a value on?

Clear objectives based on research, experience and physical and financial resources have to be set, taking into account the reasons for financing education for three year olds. Children at the age of three benefit from a social environment, and gain valuable learning experiences from being and playing in the company of children their own age.

b) There will initially be considerable cost in expanding the education provision for three year olds, what form of provision is this expansion going to take?

Full time, Part time?

This cost can be limited in a number of ways;
Using existing childcare provision, i.e. Non-statutory groups that includes voluntary and private and independent sectors.
The links with schools can be forged, so that there is seen to be progression.
The inspection units for education provision can be streamlined to provide a more cohesive and consistent service for children.
Training for the staff providing the service to be accessible and available to all sectors.

As this is a new initiative a fresh approach can be given to the aspect of child care and education (at the age of three the two cannot be separated), the importance of getting the balance right effects the whole of the education system, as the child moves through it. As the formative years are the most important in a child's life educationally it is imperative we get it right.
POWYS EARLY YEAR PARTNERSHIP

The Powys Partnership is pleased to be able express their views on the two elements of the remit, but regret that the required response time prevents a detailed reply.

1a) the educational and developmental value of early years education for 3 year olds, and

1b) the cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers

The agreed policy of the Powys Early Years and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) as expressed in the Early Years Development Plan is that, with very few exceptions, the most appropriate setting for 3 Year Olds in Early Years Education is not within the maintained schools sector. This does not preclude the close links which are to be encouraged between other Early Years education providers and schools. Indeed, in the Powys context, it is sometimes necessary and mutually beneficial to share school sites.

‘establish the principle that children below the age of four should only exceptionally be placed within the state maintained school setting’

Key Issue 6 - Powys Early Years Development Plan 1998-99

It is the view of the EYDCP that settings for very young children must be wholly appropriate to their very specific needs. With a significant proportion of children in Powys Schools being educated in mixed aged classes it would be inappropriate to add young three year olds to such settings.

‘...we believe that the earliest years of a child’s education must be founded on a partnership between the home and the provider and any other appropriate partners. It must be child centred - in that each individual child should enter the educational environment which is most appropriate for them at time which is in accord with their development.’

Introduction: Powys Early Years Development Plan 1998-99

Powys Local Education Authority is conscious of the challenge presented when teaching young children in mixed age classes. This is illustrated by an extract from the 1999-2000 Integrated Early Years and Childcare Plan.

In Powys the particular challenge lies with the organisation of an appropriate curriculum for those Nursery / Reception children in mixed age classes. Figures for 1997/98 show that in 50.9% of schools four year olds were taught in classes with pupils aged 4 to 7 and 37% in mixed aged Nursery Reception classes. Training will be targeted to this particular group. Those managing and providing provision for four year olds will be encouraged:

• to provide information for and work in partnership with parents on appropriate learning activities for four year olds;
• to ensure that all staff in reception and mixed age classes (including support staff) are appropriately trained to work with young children;
• to work towards ensuring that child/adult ratios compare favourably with those in nursery classes and other pre-school settings;
• to ensure that each Early Years child has an appropriate play-based curriculum, which reflects the children’s development stage;
• to ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced across all areas of learning and is meaningful for all young children;
• to work towards the provision for each Early Years child of direct access to a safe outdoor area for regular curriculum and play use;
• to ensure the environment stimulates the development of learning dispositions and intellectual development;
• sufficient space for Early Years play activities.

Powys Early Years and Childcare Plan 1999-2000

The unique challenge of providing good quality early years education in rural areas is one which the Partnership continues to address. In addition to the enormous capital cost required for new build, there are significant difficulties in the more isolated parts of the County with the provision of transport for such young children.

Target provision for 3 year olds: It is the intention of the Partnership to work towards the provision of at least part-time free provision for three year olds outside the maintained school sector. Subject to the availability of funding from the Welsh Office, or from other sources, the Partnership will seek to promote, maintain and develop services in the future to ensure that all three year olds, whose parents wish it, have the opportunity to access a minimum of two sessions of pre-school provision per week. The funding required to enable this level of support is estimated at a minimum of £770,000 (based on 1998 figures, excluding capital and transport costs)

Powys Early Years and Childcare Plan 1999-2000

There is ample evidence world-wide of the positive long term effects of good quality early childhood programmes, but significantly, there is also a growing body of research linking excessively formal early educational settings where there is little emphasis on play with academic under-performance later in life. The Powys Partnership supports the Government’s desire to raise educational standards, but wishes to state unequivocally that reducing the age of admission to formal education would not be the most appropriate way of achieving this shared goal. The Partnership would like to see the continued development of good quality opportunities for all children to engage in appropriate pre-school education and care in a range of setting which best meet their and the family needs.

Current concerns about the viability of present private and voluntary sector settings would be alleviated if funding was made available for Early Years education, as it has in England. Any expansion of the maintained sector would have disastrous effects on this type of provision.

The Partnership, using audit information, estimates that if Early Years Education for 3 Year Olds were to be funded in the maintained school sector that over 50% of playgroups, private nurseries and parent/toddler groups would fail. The knock-on effect on childcare for 0-3 year olds would be catastrophic.
The Partnership is aware of concerns that some settings for three-year-olds (within the non-maintained sector) are struggling to be financially viable especially with many older three year olds entering school. Many pre-schools have continued to struggle financially this year in anticipation of Welsh Office funding for three-year-olds being made available in 1999. Now that additional Welsh Office funding for Early Years education will not be available in Powys the Partnership would wish to attempt to ensure the sustainability of the pre-schools at greatest risk of closure (often those in rural areas). This would be undertaken through the use of the 1999-2000 Welsh Office childcare grant and by the provision of advice and support as required.

Powys Early Years and Childcare Plan 1999-2000

Conclusion:

The Powys Early Years and Childcare Partnership supports the extension of good quality Early Years provision to three year olds, provided it is appropriately targeted at the developmental needs of children of that age, and funded to ensure that premises, staffing and resourcing are at the required level.

Further information:

If the Committee wishes to undertake further research to inform themselves of the research undertaken both in Britain and other parts of the world we would recommend the following sources:

1. Effectiveness of Early Interventions: Oliver, Smith & Barker. Thomas Coram Research Unit
   Thomas Coram Research Unit
   Institute of Education
   University of London
   27-28 Woburn Square
   London WC1H 0AA

   http://www.futureofchildren.org

   Http://www.ecdgroup.com/archive/po.html


**ACCAC**

(QUALIFICATIONS, CURRICULUM & ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY FOR WALES)

**Purpose**

1. The Pre-16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee has invited ACCAC's views on:-
   
   a. the educational and developmental value of early years education for 3 year olds, and
   b. the cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers.

   Paragraphs 3-17 of this paper address the first element of this remit. Paragraphs 18-20 address
   the second element, insofar as it relates to address the need for appropriate qualifications for
   early years education and the childcare sector.

2. The paper will be supported by an oral presentation by Mr Brian Connolly (the Chairman of
   ACCAC), Mr Gary Brace (Assistant Chief Executive –Curriculum and Assessment 5-14) and Mr
   Kim Ebrahim (Vocational Qualifications Adviser).

**Background**

3. There is a strong tradition in Wales of starting school at an early age, and, although there is
   some diversity in the range of admissions policies, the practice of admitting four-year-olds to
   school full time is well established. In 1997/98, 77% of all the three- and four-year-olds in
   Wales were in school either on a full-time or part-time basis. Of the total number, 62% of
   pupils under 5 were full-time in primary schools, of which 10% were pupils aged 3 or under. In
   addition, there are places in nurseries and playgroups for 48% of all the 3 and 4 year olds in
   Wales. (Source: National Assembly Statistical Directorate).

4. The introduction of the National Curriculum for pupils of statutory school age focused
   attention on the provision for under-5s in school and in playgroup/nursery settings. Awdurdod
   Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru/the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACAC)
   published, in 1996, ‘Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning Before Compulsory School Age’
   which described areas of learning and experience which pupils should have prior to compulsory
   school age. This booklet (which has been circulated to Members of the Committee) built on the
   guidance set out in ‘Under-Fives in School’ published by the Curriculum Council for Wales

**Principles**

5. Whether children benefit from early years provision is not disputed. What is at issue is the
   nature of that provision, in relation to 3 Year Olds.

6. The principles which underpin the Desirable Outcomes document are that pre-school provision
   should:
• contribute to the all-round growth and development of every child;

• provide a springboard for learning through both structured and spontaneous play;

• ensure active involvement and relevant first hand experience in an environment rich with possibilities;

• value the contribution which parents or carers make to their child’s education and encourages a working partnership;

• ensure that equal opportunities are offered to girls and boys, to children with special learning needs and to those from different cultures; and

• provide experiences and opportunities for young children to become aware of the distinctiveness of Wales, its languages and culture.

The curriculum for 3 and 4 year olds

7. A curriculum for children under five years of age will build upon and extend their early experiences in order to nurture learning, in the same way as a secondary curriculum develops further the experiences of the primary phase. Because young children are at their most receptive and vulnerable during this stage of their development, it is of great importance to understand that a curriculum for the under-fives refers to all the experiences a setting provides, both consciously and otherwise, which promote the development of the whole child. It is especially appropriate to think of the curriculum for under-fives as being experienced rather than being delivered.

Curriculum content

8. Young children do not recognise subject boundaries and a principal feature of good practice in relation to under fives provision is the inter-related way the strands which make up the curriculum content are presented and experienced. In order to ensure breadth and balance in the provision for under-fives, it is generally considered helpful to analyse and plan the curriculum content from a flexible framework. The approach widely accepted by those working with children under five is to plan from areas of experience and learning.

9. The Desirable Outcomes document sets out six areas of learning and experience which should characterise the curriculum for under-fives:

• Language, Literacy and Communication skills;
• Personal and Social Development;
• Mathematical Development;
• Knowledge and Understanding of the World;
• Physical Development;
• Creative Development.

The details of the experiences that pupils should have within these six areas are set out in the Desirable Outcomes document.
10. These areas of learning are not discrete, separate subject areas but rather integrated and overlapping areas of experience. Beginning to understand the uses of money, for example, is a mathematical experience as much as it is a social experience and it has also to do with understanding the world about us. Similarly, understanding spatial relationships – that is where things are in relation to other things – needs effective language experience, but also a grasp of mathematical and scientific ideas which may, in turn, need physical skills to realise.

11. The Desirable Outcomes are, as the title suggests, the experiences pre-school which children should have to enable them to know, understand and do certain things by the time they are of compulsory school age. The Desirable Outcomes are not a ‘Key Stage Zero’ which set out programmes of study and attainment targets for 3 and 4 year olds to achieve. However, the areas of experience outlined in Desirable Outcomes are complimentary to the National Curriculum and will facilitate children’s entry to the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum when they are 5 years old.

Inspections by ESTYN indicate the positive impact the Desirable Outcomes document is having on provision and standards in the maintained and non-maintained sectors.

12. The system of statutory baseline assessment in Wales which will come into effect in September 1999, following a national pilot year, will measure what pupils can do when they first start school in the Reception Year (or Year 1, if this is when they start school) in:

- language skills;
- mathematical skills;
- personal and social skills.

13. These baseline assessment arrangements build on the Desirable Outcomes but they are not an assessment mechanism for any taught pre-compulsory school age curriculum which children may have experienced through playgroups or nurseries. Rather, they enable an assessment to be made of what pupils know, understand and can do at the start of compulsory education in order that teachers can be helped to better plan for individual pupils’ progress.

14. During the recent development of the proposals for a revised National Curriculum for Wales, there was strong support for retaining the Desirable Outcomes in their current form. ACCAC intends to republish the document and to provide guidance to schools on progression from the areas of experience and learning in the Desirable Outcomes to Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum.

**Teaching and Learning**

15. There are few boundaries for the child between aspects of learning or between play and work. Three and four year olds experience the curriculum through a range of play. Well structured and purposeful play activities make certain that the children encounter the learning experiences intended by the "teacher."

16. Young children have a natural capacity and appetite for playing, talking, being full of curiosity and being actively involved in doing things. For the child, play can be and often is a very serious business. It needs concentrated attention. It is all about perseverance, attending to detail,
learning and concentrating – characteristics usually associated with work. Play is not only crucial to the way children become self aware and the way in which they learn the rules of social behaviour; it is also fundamental to intellectual development.

17. Young children learn most effectively when they are actively involved in first hand experiences. Provision for young children is centred on the child. It is about adults understanding, inspiring and challenging the child’s talent to learn, with adult involvement in children's play being of vital importance. Good early years providers are there to help children, to guide their play, to offer choices, to challenge children with care and sensitivity, to encourage them and to move their learning along.

18. In order to promote effective learning, “teachers” channel these strengths into their planned activities and create an enabling atmosphere where:

- talking, asking questions and giving honest answers are the norm;
- curiosity, imagination and a sense of wonder are fostered;
- exploring with the senses and participating are encouraged.

Knowing about child development and the basic needs of three- and four-year-olds increases their understanding and helps make the provision for young children, appropriate and enjoyable. When learning is fun, children establish positive attitudes towards learning, how to learn, and the skill of studying.

Developments elsewhere in the United Kingdom

19. The Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum has recently produced A Curriculum Framework for children 3 to 5 which contains very similar messages to those contained in Desirable Outcomes but with the absence of any reference to mathematical development. The Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has produced Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education again with similar areas of experience to Desirable Outcomes but with the addition of an area dealing with science and technology. In England, it is proposed that Early Learning Goals will replace the Desirable Learning Outcomes previously published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), which again covers similar areas of experience to Desirable Outcomes but in a more prescriptive manner.

National Qualifications for early years education and the childcare sector

20. An expansion of provision for 3 year olds will require the availability of appropriate qualifications.

21. In June 1998, the Welsh Office published a Green Paper, "The National Childcare Strategy in Wales" which set out proposals to ensure good quality, affordable childcare for children aged 0-14 in every neighbourhood. ACCAC was asked to contribute to the strategy, alongside the emerging National Training Organisations (NTOs), by taking forward work to develop and implement a framework for qualifications and training in the early years education and childcare sectors. The framework for qualifications and training is a key part of the Childcare Strategy, enabling people to develop the skills they need to deliver the quality of childcare services required.
22. ACCAC undertook a Wales-wide consultation on the "Draft framework for qualifications and training in early years education, childcare and playwork sector". The feedback from the consultation confirmed support for the concept of a framework that identifies which qualifications are associated with specific job roles, and how existing training can lead to those qualifications. A summary has been circulated to Committee Members.

23. ACCAC is currently working with QCA to accredit new vocational qualifications to enter the framework. The emerging qualifications will be mapped against National Occupational Standards developed by the NTOs to ensure that the needs of the sector are met. ACCAC has the responsibility in Wales for accrediting qualifications against the national criteria which will be agreed jointly with the other regulatory bodies (QCA in England and CCEA in Northern Ireland).
CHILDREN IN WALES EARLY YEARS UNIT

Children in Wales is the national umbrella children’s organisation in Wales with member organisations from the voluntary, statutory and independent sectors and from all disciplines involved with children’s services. The principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child underpin our work and these apply across all aspects of a child and young person’s life. The legislation affecting children in the UK is unfortunately not consistent. For instance the Children Act 1989 considers the welfare of the child to be paramount whereas education legislation embodies few of the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children in Wales is a major contributor to the development of policy for children in Wales and before the Assembly came into being, gave evidence to the government’s Select Committee on Child Care. A significant part of that evidence highlighted the difference between provision for young children in Wales and in other European countries.

We therefore greatly welcome the Under 16 Education Committee’s focus on the education and development of young children. This issue is extremely important for the Assembly to consider as it will have far reaching consequences on the immediate and long term educational, social and emotional development of young children in Wales.

Any proposed change must ensure that the child’s interests remain paramount within any political agenda to improve standards. It is also essential that evidence on young children’s learning and development be carefully considered both from a national and an international perspective, so that the appropriate outcomes are achieved.

Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships in Wales are committed to planning for the needs and interests of 0-8 year olds. Professionals in the field on these partnerships do not therefore subscribe to the view that “three years olds” should be considered as a discrete group, because this creates another example of the fractured/piecemeal approach to policy formulation for young children which has been a major cause for concern over the years. A holistic approach to developing child centred services for young children rather than bureaucratic and arbitrary divisions is fundamental.

Early entry into school has long been a feature of education in Wales. Whilst children in the UK have begun formal education earlier than children in Europe (or almost anywhere else in the world), the majority of Welsh children have started school at four and some at three – now being considered as the official starting age. It is therefore imperative that the Committee deconstructs the vast body of evidence, which demonstrates the effectiveness of early educational experiences. Research by Osborne and Milbank (1989) and Sharp et al found no conclusive evidence to suggest that there is any educational or behavioural advantage, for children entering primary school before five per se. International comparisons produce no definitive evidence that early formal teaching leads to improved performance in literacy and numeracy but that well planned experiences based on active learning and purposeful play are strongly linked to success.

The most comprehensive overview of the available evidence is the Start Right Report 1994 and The National Commission on Education (1992) shows that provision based on key principles can enhance learning and development, whatever the setting – school, playgroup, day nursery or childminder. Young children learn through exploration, first hand experience, play and communication. Evidence from neuroscience and international studies concur that children learn best when they are involved, interested, confident and secure in themselves and others. Conversely a formal early introduction to
the three Rs is far more likely to make early learning a burden for the child. The key issue for the Assembly to consider is how to ensure that 3 year olds are offered an appropriate experience regardless of the setting.

In Wales the Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning are grounded in a set of principles and a value base, which reflect best early years practice. The guidance endorses the need for young children to be stimulated, motivated and inspired by sensitive responsive adults.

Yet the latest OHMCI Report into standards and quality, whilst attributing an improvement in quality to the clear guidance produced by ACCAC said “that progress towards increasing the amount of good work tends to be slow”

In 15% of maintained settings, most commonly reception and mixed-age infant classes, the quality of education provision for 4 year olds is unsatisfactory. The children in these settings make slow and uncertain progress in all aspects of their work. In 45% of non-maintained playgroups and nurseries weaknesses in the planning mean that children’s progress is haphazard and uneven.

If so many 4 year olds are receiving unsatisfactory experiences in settings in both sectors what is the prognosis for 3 year olds? If there is a dearth of stimulating activities; an over-emphasis on formal and sedentary tasks; a neglect of physical activity; poor outdoor provision; insufficient use of the real world and lack of time and space for children to develop their powers of communication and imagination, then their learning will be stunted and the consequences bleak for many 3 year olds.

Teachers in reception and mixed age classes in Wales have to take into account the requirements of the National Curriculum, Baseline Assessment as well as Desirable Outcomes and it is likely that with the best will in the world, planning to meet the needs of three year olds might be marginalised or given lowest priority. Quality will inevitably be compromised.

**Recommendation**

The Committee should consider the experience of countries other than England in this review. There are established models of early excellence in Europe, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. New Zealand, Southern Ireland and Scotland have recently conducted an extensive examination of their policies and produced a framework for early learning which is appropriate for young children in all settings – schools, playgroups etc.

**The cost of expanding quality provision for 3 year olds**

**Training**

The training of early years workers in Wales poses a major problem. Children in Wales has received money from the Childcare Strategy to audit training and to map the availability of courses and the linkages between them. Many workers are unqualified or have inappropriate qualifications. ACCAC has consulted on a Framework of Qualifications and Training for Early Years Workers to clarify progression routes. This will be an extremely valuable step forward.

GEST funding would need to be increased to develop the understanding and skills of teachers responsible for early years education (the majority have little expertise in early education which has
been dropped from initial teacher training courses). Staff in playgroups and private day nurseries need subsidised training and to acquire NVQs in Early Education and Childcare. Funding should be made available to train early years advisers and development officers as well as inspectors.

**Staffing**

Funding must be made available to improve the ratio of adults to children to match the requirements of nursery education. Teachers cannot deliver a programme that is responsive to the needs and interests of children aged from 3 to 7 years in large classes.

**Physical resources**

Many classrooms have limited space and inappropriate equipment and many schools lack outdoor play space, which is crucial to the education and development of young children. This would require a huge investment.

**The impact of expansion of provision on childcare providers**

This paper has focussed largely on the impact on young children of the expansion of maintained provision since this trend has accelerated greatly over the past year.

However both Wales Pre-school Playgroups Association and Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin have been the biggest providers of pre-school education for 3 year olds. Playgroups have a distinct philosophy and ethos, which recognise the importance of play, active learning and socialisation. Playgroups also encourage parents to take an active role in their children's learning and to develop their understanding of child development through courses, meetings and community development. This is of particular importance where social inclusion is an issues. In the case of Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, the organisation has been a fundamental foundation for the development of the Welsh language across Wales.

If more playgroups close (we await evidence from the review commissioned by the Assembly) then a catalyst for community action will be lost including parent and toddler provision, parenting support and routes into training and work for many women.

The impact on Welsh medium provision would be devastating and the expertise and commitment of playgroup workers and volunteers made redundant. The ability of young children to become bilingual is well documented and the cost to children, families, communities and the culture of Wales would be incalculable.

In addition, both playgroup movements in Wales have pioneered the inclusion of young disabled children in local groups. Decreased funding for the Referral Schemes has already led to a decrease in numbers; closure of more groups would mean that less children and families could experience community support and involvement.
**Conclusion**

Children in Wales urges the Committee to consider carefully the proposed expansion of education for 3 year olds. A proper framework needs to be developed to support early learning in both the maintained and voluntary sectors.

No amount of literacy schemes, numeracy schemes, homework clubs/contracts, anti-truancy/school exclusion measures will compensate for rich, appropriate early years experiences.

Hurried policy changes, like the concept of the hurried child, must be resisted at all costs.

**Appendix**


Cleave, S & Brown, S: Early to School: Four year olds in infant classes. NFER Nelson


Rumbold Committee Report: Starting with Quality 1990. HMSO


Sylva, K (1997): The Early Years Curriculum: Evidence Based Proposals, Paper to SCM Conference

Sharp, C (1998): Age of Starting School and the Early Years Curriculum. NFER


CHWARAE TEG

Introduction

Chwarae Teg is an organisation which aims to expand the role of women in the Welsh workforce. This response to the questions raised by the Committee is based on Chwarae Teg’s experience in (i) funding and monitoring a range of demonstration nurseries for children under 5 in Wales, and (ii) operating the out of school child care initiative formerly in South East Wales and, latterly throughout Wales. Our experience is predominantly in the field of child care in settings where the emphasis is on play.

The Committee asked for Chwarae Teg’s views on two district elements of its remit. The response is as follows –

The Educational and Developmental Value of Early Years Education for 3 Year Olds

The response to this question depends on the definition of ‘early years education’. If this is a full time activity tied to a tight interpretation of ‘learning’ targets, leaving little scope for play, then we would not support the expansion of the educational system. How would a young child develop at his/her own rate, if put into a system that regulates children according to a ‘standard’? Socialisation is a key aspect of development at this age and must be developed at the child’s own rate. The environment within an educational setting could be considered to be more about structure, than care for very small children. If a care component is added on to a full ‘educational’ day a 3 year old could experience a long and stressful day – a full day at school and an after school setting.

If, however, the definition implies that the child is in an educational environment where the emphasis is on learning through play (as it is already in play groups throughout the country) then this approach could enhance children’s development. If, in addition, the activity was part-time, small children could move, less stressfully, into care, at the end of the part-time session.

Ultimately, it seems to us, that the arguments are around play versus learning; full-time versus part-time; care versus education. These polarities demonstrate the strength of the feelings that lie behind them. Our view is that small children should not become footballs in turf wars between opposing views of child development. In a small country like Wales, there must be room for research, innovation and a ‘third way’ which celebrates rather than competes with the very best of current provision for 3 year olds and recognises the key role of the voluntary sector.

The cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers

If increased numbers of 3 year olds move into ‘education’, there will be increased costs in inspection; staffing; buildings and equipment.

The issues around registration (social services) and inspection (Estyn) will need clarification/harmonisation if dual inspection/registration costs are to be avoided. The ratios of staff to children under 8 differ between social services (1-8) and education (1-13) – but these ratios will impact on the numbers of staff required.
If 3 year olds are to spend half a day in ‘education’ followed by time in ‘care’, there will be a need for more qualified nursery teachers in schools, matched by increased numbers of play staff, able to focus on the needs of very young children. There will need to be increased numbers of Welsh speaking nursery teachers and play workers.

As far as buildings and equipment are concerned, there will be a need for schools to meet current social services registration requirements and for schools, private providers, voluntary providers to fund age-appropriate play equipment, furniture, increased space for rest areas.

The impact of including 3 year olds into mainstream education will be felt most in the voluntary sector by Wales Pre-School Playgroups and Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin. These groups will probably lose most of their present clientele to the school setting unless schools use the community groups to supplement and enhance the provision offered in their Authority in an attempt to reduce building and staffing costs. The inspection of playgroups as educational settings for 4 year olds has already begun under Estyn (under the voucher scheme) and could be extended for 3 year olds. However, if the local authority does not embrace the playgroups they will undoubtedly close, as has been seen in England and Wales, since the inclusion of 4 year olds into full time education.

As the playgroups are registered to take children from the age of 2 and a half it may mean that their client group will shrink to cover children for half a year only. Playgroups will not then be viable. One possible option could be that the Education Departments could ring-fence funding to support voluntary sector provision particularly in areas of disadvantage.

The impact will also be felt by private day care providers who will not be able to profitably provide part-time care. Conversely, if they moved into ‘education’ their staffing costs would rise. Childminders could increasingly play an enhanced role (as many do already) in the provision of wrap around care. Again, there could be increased costs in this approach.

At present, the provision of ‘after school’ or ‘wrap around’ care for under 5’s lacks clarity. Playgroups operate for fixed sessions that suit their workers and their clientele. After school clubs (aimed at working parents), provide care mainly for 5-12’s at present – increasing to 14’s, under the Childcare Strategy in Wales. If more 3 year olds move into education, play groups (who have the age-specific experience) could provide wrap around care for 3 to 5 year olds, or, after school clubs (who lack the age-specific experience) could move down the age range. Both approaches would require increased funding.

The complexities of this approach for an out of school club and registration staff are legion.

At present, for example, Social Services Daycare Registration Officers appear to be uneasy about registering Out of School provision to include 3 year olds. The Children Act 1989 classifies out of school care as being "school age children, sometimes including under-5s". Children aged 3 in the same building from 8am until 6pm are similar to, if not the same as, full day care, and may have to be registered as such. Continuity of care is not a problem, but the suitability of the provision and the content of the day should be carefully monitored.

Example: One after school club offers breakfast care 8 – 9am. Children then attend school or the private playgroup, which is held in the same dedicated building. Those attending the private playgroup can book a morning session, an afternoon session, or both. For lunch, those playgroup children attending both morning and afternoon sessions must be taken off site (on the
recommendation of the Registration Officer) and they go to the school for lunch. They return to
the playgroup for the afternoon session. At the end of the school day children attend the after
school club. If any child from the playgroup is in after school provision, then children aged 8 and
over must be accommodated separately in the school (on the advice of the Registration Officer).
This has staffing implications and rent implications as well as requirements for extra equipment.

This arrangement works, and offers choice for children and parents, but it works, despite, rather
than because of, the regulations.

Our view is that if the Committee moves in the direction of part-time ‘education’ for 3 year olds, it
should work with the key organisations already in the field to develop the way forward on
education, play and care. The valuable work of the playgroup movement needs to be taken forward,
in mutual agreement, for the benefit of children and parents in Wales.
CWMNI IAITH CYF

Comments on aspects identified presented by Sian Wyn Siencyn, Cwmni laith Cyf.

The educational and developmental value of early years education for 3 year olds.

There is a considerable body of research, over a period of time, which substantiates the supposition that providing young children with high quality education is beneficial, both to them and to society generally (see Appendix). The principle of provision is no longer a matter of discussion. There is, however, a great need for an informed, mature, non-sectoral all-Wales discussion on the crucial delivery details. As the should-we-do-it argument has long been won, we should now be in the how-to-do-it stage, which will include planning carefully for

- quality of the provision
- staffing of the provision
- training of the personnel

There is universal agreement (see Appendix) on what underpins high quality educational provision for 3 year olds.

Quality

The most important aspect of quality is that the provision is appropriate, that it is consistent with the needs of the child. The principle of appropriateness is highlighted in “Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning” (page 4, ACCAC 1996). Quality provision would include

- appropriateness of physical space
- appropriateness of children’s experiences
- appropriateness of adult approaches
- appropriateness of adult:child ratios

A great many complex interactions and further defined needs lie within the requirements for appropriate provision, for example appropriate adult approaches would include an understanding of the importance of sufficient flexible time in children’s play.

Conclusion

The limitations of this response do not allow for a properly detailed look at the requirements for quality in provision for three year olds. Suffice to say that quality is the critical factor. Good quality nursery provision is both educationally and socially beneficial for 3 year old children.

The cost of expanding nursery education for 3 year old children

There are a number of issues which will impact on funding. Other respondents will no doubt draw the Committee’s attention to funding implications for local authorities through the Standard
Spending mechanisms and for schools through Funding for Schools mechanisms. There are other issues, for example:

- training: shortage of qualified staff (an on-going Children in Wales audit of training for early years personnel already indicates the diverse and patchy nature of training, there is a lot of training taking place but little apparent co-ordination or planning). GEST training programmes would need to address the needs for re-training teachers and the re-deployment of teachers and other support workers. The ACCAC framework, not yet published, will be useful. The National Council for Education and Training for Wales proposed by ETAG and being discussed by the National Assembly Post 16 Education Committee would surely have a vital role in this regard.

- physical resources: there is already concern regarding the placement, often with insufficient planning, of 4 year old children in reception classes. Teachers are coping under difficult conditions, such as
  - insufficient space
  - inadequate adult:child ratios
  - different curricular/educational expectations (Desirable Outcomes and National Curriculum Key Stage 1)

There would need to be a major investment in physical resources: classrooms, outdoor play areas, appropriate equipment and so on to provide appropriate provision for 3 year old children.

- staffing: the need, already identified in the National Childcare Strategy, for an increased workforce. A planned and co-ordinated approach must be implemented. The original proposal to recruit from the New Deal service has, to date, not been successful. A Working with Children Taster Training Course developed and piloted by a consortium of organisations including Children in Wales, Chwarae Teg, MYM, WPPA and NCMA highlighted the difficulties in the New Deal route. Much needs to be done further with the Taster course with a range of other and possibly more fruitful groups, for example lone parent support groups.

Conclusions

Delivering an entitlement service which does not, in any uniform way, exist at present, must surely have serious financial implications.

It would, at best, be rash to develop nursery education for 3 year olds without also ensuring adequate financial commitment and that appropriate funding mechanisms are in place.

The impact of expansion of provision for 3 year olds on childcare providers

The voluntary sector (mainly MYM and WPPA) have been significant providers of nursery education for 3 year olds. The development of this provision in schools has, by all accounts, already had an adverse affect on this voluntary provision. These are some of the considerations:

- Numbers of playgroups: the review presently being undertaken by the Assembly will provide evidence of what has and is happening to this service.
• Community service: playgroups offer a service in the community. The voluntary sector profile is comparatively sketchy (that is, compared with local authority provision in schools). The dynamic between the community and the provision is something that needs to be considered carefully. There is a huge potential for this provision in the development of Early Literacy and Family Literacy.

• Parental involvement: a great deal of research indicates the importance of effective and equitable partnership between parents and providers. Playgroups are, it is thought, perceived as being less formal, more approachable than schools. Parents are involved not only in fund raising but also in the actual delivery of the service. This hands-on involvement probably has a positive impact of parent confidence and parent skills.

• Welsh medium services: MYM is generally acknowledged as being the most important player in the development of Welsh medium education over the last thirty years. MYM has offered parents a real choice and has developed an expertise in early years bilingualism and early years immersion education which is recognised world-wide. It has done this whilst also ensuring its place as a provider of high quality nursery provision for all children in Wales. This two pronged expertise - Welsh medium services and nursery provision for children - is unique to Wales.

• Special Educational Needs: the playgroup movement has been instrumental, over many years, in normalising the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream community services. It has been able to do this for many reasons, including the non-bureaucratic approach to inclusion, co-operation with statutory agencies on early identification and assessment of special needs, funding of Referral Schemes to enable inclusion and so on.

• Staffing and recruitment: there is a great deal of anecdotal evidence of women working in childcare and early years services as a result of their experiences in local playgroups with their own children. The local community playgroup is probably a more effective recruitment agency than is commonly thought. Such women would not have this route to further training in early years services if all services were school based.

Conclusion

The voluntary sector has provided children and families in Wales a unique service over many years. By its very nature, the voluntary sector needs help to adapt to the requirements of the new game. If it is not supported, it will fall into decline. Losing the experience, energy and enthusiasm of the voluntary sector would impoverish community life in Wales.

Appendix

A few useful references regarding importance of quality provision for nursery age children:


The Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study - an outline of a major American research study is to be found on www.fpg.unc.edu/~NCEDL:
Starting with Quality, the Rumbold Committee Report 1990


Start Right: The Importance of Early Learning, The Ball Report to the RSA 1994.

Facilities and Condition in Pre-school Provision, Eurydice: The Information Network on Education in Europe on www.eurydice.org/present.htm
ESTYN

The statutory basis for inspection

The inspection of educational provision in nursery, primary and special schools in Wales is undertaken by Estyn in accordance with Section 10 of the Schools Inspection Act 1996. The Act prescribes that it is the duty of the Chief Inspector for Wales to secure that every school in Wales to which the regulations apply is inspected at such intervals as may be prescribed. An initial, five-year cycle of inspections of nursery, primary and special schools in Wales was concluded in July 1999. A new, six-year cycle of inspections was introduced in September 1999. The inspection of nursery, primary and special schools includes the inspection of any educational provision for three-year-olds.

The inspection of educational provision in non-maintained nurseries eligible for funding under the arrangements for Early Years Development Plans is governed by the requirements of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. The Act requires the Chief Inspector for Wales to keep the National Assembly for Wales informed about:

i. the quality and standards of nursery education;

ii. the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children for whom nursery education is provided.

Nurseries included in a local education authority’s Early Years Development Plan are required to:

i. work towards agreed educational outcomes;

ii. be subject to regular independent inspection of their educational provision.

The purpose of inspection is to identify good features and shortcomings so that providers can improve the quality of education they provide and raise the standards of children’s achievements. The report published after an inspection provides information for the Early Years Partnership, the local authority, parents and the local community about the quality of educational provision. Inspection findings also contribute to the annual report of the Chief Inspector for Wales and form the basis of advice to the National Assembly for Wales.

The nature of educational provision for three-year-olds

Currently, approximately 75% of all three and four-year-olds in Wales attend local authority maintained schools. Maintained educational provision for three-year-olds includes nursery schools, designated nursery classes and units, and infant/reception classes in primary schools.

Nursery schools are funded directly by local authorities and cater predominantly for 3-4 year-olds who attend mainly on a part-time basis, usually for five morning sessions or five afternoon sessions weekly. Most children who attend nursery schools transfer to an infant/reception class in a primary school at the start of the academic year following their fourth birthday.
Nursery and infant/reception classes in primary schools are funded from within the schools’ delegated budgets as part of each local authority’s arrangement for the Local Management of Schools. Attendance at nursery classes or units is usually on a part-time basis, but attendance at infant/reception classes tends to be full-time, especially for four-year-olds. Nursery classes cater mainly for children aged 3-4 years, whilst reception classes cater mainly for children aged 4-5 years. Infant classes often cater for a wide age range and, in a significant proportion of primary schools in Wales, children who are not of statutory school age are taught alongside children who are.

Currently, there are over 3,000 childminders and approaching 2,000 playgroups or day nurseries in Wales. They are regulated under the Children Act 1989 by local authority social services departments. A minority of the settings, currently approximately 150, have been named by local authorities as eligible for funding under the arrangements for their Early Years Development Plans. These settings have their educational provision inspected by Estyn.

A playgroup is defined as a group offering sessional care for two hours or more and with no session lasting more than four hours. Most playgroups provide places for children aged between two-and-a-half and four years, though the number of four-year-olds is relatively low. Most commonly, the playgroups are open either during the morning or the afternoon sessions only for periods of between 2-3 hours. A minority of playgroups are open during both the morning and afternoon sessions and sometimes cater for children on a full-time basis.

The quality of educational provision for three-year-olds

In both the maintained and the non-maintained sectors, the quality of educational provision for three-year-olds continues to improve. The improvement is largely attributable to the provision by the Curriculum, Qualifications and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) of guidance on the desirable outcomes for children’s learning before compulsory school age. The guidance has helped to clarify the nature of the early years curriculum for teachers and adults working with very young children and has led to greater consistency in planning.

In the maintained sector, the overall quality of educational provision for three-year-olds is satisfactory or better in nearly 90% of early years settings, including about 60% where it is good or very good. Effective work is characterised by good curriculum planning and the provision of a broad and balanced range of learning experiences matched appropriately to the children’s developing needs and abilities. Close account is taken of the ‘Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning’ and the children have good opportunities to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills in the six areas of learning through play and other practical experiences. Where the quality of educational provision is unsatisfactory, weaknesses in the planning and organisation of the work are mainly responsible. Such weaknesses tend to be most prevalent in small schools (three or fewer teachers) where staff often find it hard to set work of an appropriate level for a class in which there are under-fives working towards the Desirable Outcomes for Learning as well as older pupils who are being taught the programmes of study of the National Curriculum. In these classes, pupils are often either moved on too quickly towards National Curriculum work or given an insufficiently structured early-years experience.

In the non-maintained sector, the overall quality of educational provision for three-year-olds is satisfactory or better in about 55% of playgroups and nurseries, including around 20% where it is good. In a further 45% of non-maintained nurseries and playgroups, though satisfactory and occasionally good standards are achieved in some areas of learning, weaknesses in planning,
organisation and assessment mean that the children are not developing as well as they might. Their progress tends to be haphazard and uneven, particularly in early literacy and early numeracy. Overall standards in children’s personal and social development are at least satisfactory, and often good, in around 85% of the nurseries and playgroups. Most non-maintained playgroups and nurseries have close links with parents/carers and the local community.

The educational and developmental advantages of early years education

The educational and developmental advantages of early years education for three-year-olds include:

- offering care and education together;
- helping to promote positive attitudes to learning which ensure that the children are well disposed to statutory schooling;
- assisting children from disadvantaged home backgrounds to make rapid gains, for example in early literacy, and thus close the gap between them and children from more advantaged home backgrounds;
- enabling children to make a strong early start on important things, such as personal and social development, mathematical development and language, literacy and communication skills;
- providing early support and encouragement for parents/carers to engage more in their children’s learning;
- promoting close links with parents/carers to set the direction for continued strong support from home throughout the children’s education;
- securing early structured support for children with special educational needs.

Issues

In order to promote further effective teaching and learning for three-year-olds, issues for attention include:

- the need for better planning and organisation in around 45% of non-maintained settings and about 10% of maintained settings;
- securing an appropriate balance in all early years settings between work directed by the teacher/adults and that undertaken within free or guided choice by the children;
- the continuing need for improvements in the quality and use of assessment, particularly in the non-maintained sector, to help teachers/adults focus more sharply on starting points against which progress can be measured and planned;
- the desirability of involving a qualified, early years teacher in the planning and organisation of the work in all settings;
• giving consideration to improving the adult: child ratio, particularly in mixed-age infants’ classes;

• ensuring that educational provision for three-year-olds and, subsequently, four-year-olds dovetails sensibly into the start of the National Curriculum;

• safeguarding that parents/carers are kept well informed about the content of the educational programme in the early years and bout their children’s progress and achievements.
MUDIAD YSGOLION MEITHRIN

Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin agrees with the principle which gives three year olds the opportunity to benefit from free nursery experiences at the age of three. However, after stating such a positive statement we believe that it is essential to add two clauses:

i. Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin does not believe that a child starts to learn when he is three years old. Learning is a continuous process and a child begins to learn and develop essential skills from birth. Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin acknowledges this and provides a continuous education of quality, in Cylchoedd Ti a Fi and Cylchoedd Meithrin.

ii. It is essential, if the ideal of funding education/care for three year old children is realised that the same situation does not develop as it did for four year olds. It developed into a battle for children (and therefore for money) between schools and between the statutory and voluntary sector. The voluntary sector has the advantage of being able to provide education and care in the early years when a child is two and a half. As a result of the present system of funding nursery education for four year olds many Cylchoedd Meithrin and playgroups have disappeared because Education Authorities insist on providing that education within schools. As a result hundreds of children have missed the opportunity to benefit from pre school experiences from the day when they are two and a half. If the same situation were to occur again, the Cylchoedd Meithrin and playgroups would disappear completely. Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin therefore asks the Assembly to ensure that three year olds are funded in their existing provision and that schools will not be allowed to extend their age range to include more 3 year olds. For the same reason, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin would oppose any intention by Education Authorities to increase the provision for three year olds from part time to full time, where Cylchoedd Meithrin co-operate with schools to provide similar care at present, such as ‘wrap around care’. If this were to happen, all the efforts of the Sure Start scheme would be invalid and Partnership meetings would be unnecessary.

The Start Right report (Sir Christopher Ball) states:

‘Children are most likely to thrive and learn in a secure triangle of care provided by parents, professionals and the community as a whole’.

This summarises Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin’s philosophy - we believe that it is essential to create a strong partnership between the cylch and the parents and that the cylch is a part of the local community. It is important that voluntary cylchoedd exist for numerous reasons: they ensure continuous education from the Cylch Ti a Fi to the Cylch Meithrin when a child is two and a half; they are an important tool in ensuring early identity and intervention in cases of special educational needs; they offer advice to parents - especially regarding linguistic matters when parents are non Welsh speakers. Also, all the Cylchoedd Meithrin in Wales offer employment to about 1,500 people directly, and a similar number indirectly as trainers, cleaners, hall caretakers etc, and income of over £1,000,000 is generated for local halls through hiring fees alone.

In the Anglicised areas of the South East, there are less Welsh medium schools than English medium schools. As a result Welsh medium primary schools are not community schools; they are district schools and draw children from a wide area. Children often have to travel considerable distances, either on public transport or on school buses. Cylchoedd Meithrin guide parents to choose Welsh medium education for their children and facilitates the links between parents and the feeder
primary schools. Without Cylchoedd Meithrin the school has no contact with prospective parents. The fact that the cylchoedd meithrin are part of the community is an important factor - the provision is available locally, it is convenient and accessible - important factors in considering deprived families. It is essential that cylchoedd meithrin are not weakened further by any intention to extend the provision to include three year olds.

Start Right report again states:

‘Good early learning must be appropriate to the developmental stage of three and four year olds, allowing them to explore the varieties of intelligence and styles of learning through purposeful play’.

Again, from the Welsh Affairs Committee report on Child Care in Wales (1999)

‘Apart from the damaging effect that lowering the age of school entry is having on playgroups, there is some doubt whether it is right in principle to begin school at such a young age. We noted with interest that, in Denmark, formal schooling does not begin until the age of 7: before that age, the emphasis is on learning through play and social education, though there does seem to be a move towards introducing letterwork a little earlier than in the past. There is some concern in Wales about the quality of the care, and of the learning experience, given to 3,4 and 5 year olds at school. Particular concern has been expressed about the quality of care for younger children in small rural schools, where three year olds may be taught in the same class as children up to the age of nine. There are also problems in urban schools with large class sizes in reception classes. The form of early years education is an area for urgent debate. In our view, learning through play is the right approach for very young children.’

And again

‘There was consensus among our witnesses that curricula for younger children should be play-based. As Play Wales said ‘Play is one of the most important parts of a child’s life. It can contribute in so many ways to a child’s social, emotional, physical, intellectual and creative development’. Yet it seems that those planning children’s services, and even many people working with children (childminders and nursery staff, as well as school teachers) still do not appreciate the importance of play. The Strategy must ensure that the childcare system allows children the freedom to develop through play’.

Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin would like to support these comments; we would also note our concern about the experiences three and four year olds receive within statutory provision, especially in situations where they are taught with children up to seven years old. In such situations, no age group receives due attention.

Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin would also like to express concerns about the fact that few infant teachers in Wales have been trained specifically to teach nursery children. Within the voluntary sector staff have been trained to provide early years care and education - many have completed NVQs in early years care and education.

If early years care and education for three year olds is offered only within the statutory sector, cylchoedd meithrin and playgroups would disappear completely. In fact, any further expansion in the statutory sector will have a damaging effect on the ability of voluntary cylchoedd to remain
open. Sufficient numbers are necessary if cylchoedd are to continue as viable units. The weakness of the measure for four year olds was the lack of specific guidance for the statutory sector and the fact that it was not possible to inspect those guidelines provided regarding the form of the provision. It is essential that the same situation does not develop if the provision is extended to include three year olds.

Regarding the cost of providing education for three year olds, we believe that the same funding is necessary for a three year old and a four year old child.
NATIONAL CHILD MINDING ASSOCIATION

Fuller comments are to be presented, but some of our early thoughts on your paper are, for example:

- 3 year olds can still be regarded as babies, and may not even be toilet trained;
- children need stability, love and comfort in order to develop into confident individuals;
- will the continued emphasis on an ‘educational’ environment for 3 year olds be to the detriment of their socialisation and emotional stability?
- do the proposals mean that 3 year olds would be admitted into reception classes?
- young children ideally need a flexible, one-to-one, home-based environment in order to develop through ‘free’ play which does not often happen in institutionalised care;
- have parents been asked to respond?
- these proposals may worsen childminders’ viability in the childcare market.

These comments are of course based on an initial consideration of your letter and my main purpose in writing is to ask that we be given an opportunity to prepare a full response to these very important issues.

The inclusion of NCMA’s comments in the Committee’s deliberations would, I believe, be crucial in making informed recommendations to the Assembly Secretary for Pre 16 Education, as to future policy.
NATIONAL DAY NURSERIES ASSOCIATION (SOUTH WALES)

The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) is the voice of the private sector in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This is the response of South Wales.

Our experience is from birth - teenage, with Out of School care, we are self-funding and those with four year olds are OFSTED inspected and therefore expected to educate and to provide quality care, love, nurturing and play.

The committee put forward to NDNA two distinct elements for consideration. Our response is as follows:

a. The educational and developmental value of early years education for 3 year olds

Whilst we whole heartedly approve of quality care and education for 3 year olds, we have a real concern as to the quality of care offered. Educating our 3 year olds is of course essential, providing Education means learning through play and self-exploration. Children of 3 need love, nurturing and fun. A stress free, care free life. How then can a "School" setting provide these on a 1:13 staff ratio and how will a 3 year old cope with moving from setting to setting to suit the system and school. This will certainly not benefit the child.

It is the concern of the NDNA that the child is lost in the politics. Our children, the children of Wales are being penalised, as are the Parents. Why cannot the Parents choose what is right for their child. After all they know their child and his or her needs best. Why can we not do as they do in England and issue ChildCare Vouchers and give Parents freedom of choice. Development should be to provide quality care and support and encourage existing providers - Private, Voluntary or Statutory to provide courses and training and to improve what they have and not take moneys away from other areas by over expanding with the declining birth rate.

b. The cost of expansion and the impact on ChildCare providers.

If increased numbers of 3 year olds in a state Education setting is implemented the cost to the Education System will be huge. Increased staffing, premises, equipment, inspection etc. This money it would seem will come from the primary section of Schools.

Who will inspect? Will they meet Social Service standards as well as OFSTED?

How will wrap around care be provided? 3 year olds cannot be ferried from one building to another unless we want a generation of disturbed children. Quite apart from the logistics of such a complex endeavour with several governing bodies the impact on existing provision will be catastrophic. Playgroups and Private Nursery’s losing 3 year olds are closing at an alarming rate, with years of expertise lost.

Childcare is and has always been a labour of love, a highly dedicated and caring profession. Young children deserve this stability, which will soon be lost. The provision of day-care/playgroups will suffer greatly if they only cater for the under three’s. The cost of provision for them will inevitably increase, pushing prices up for the remaining children. These services...
cannot and will not survive and will create a nation of children failing to thrive, and thousands of jobs being lost.

Margaret Hodge herself actively supports PPA and Private Sector in England and wants to encourage its growth. So why in Wales are we working in the opposite direction to the rest of the country?

NDNA firmly support quality in care and education and has its own accreditation scheme, due to be launched in October. Millions of pounds have been spent on training NVQ’s to train existing placement providers.

Please support, educate and sustain existing provision instead of spending millions on an unreasonable project.
Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds

THE NATIONAL DEAF CHILDREN’S SOCIETY

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

I. Deafness and learning difficulties

There is little recognition that deafness in itself is not a cognitive learning difficulty. However, it may be associated with unique difficulties (premised on language acquisition and development) in accessing the learning environment. This can have significant implications for effective communication skills on the part of any staff working with deaf children, classroom management, and differentiation and staff training/development.

The earliest possible intervention is required for deaf children in order to establish a language base to enable children to learn age-appropriately and will avoid the escalation of difficulties and the need for further resources later on. Despite the unique situation of deaf children there are many issues and concerns which deaf children share with other children with special educational needs (SEN).

Like any other children, deaf pupils span the entire ability range. We acknowledge that a significant number of deaf children have educational needs in addition to those associated with deafness. Research studies over time have shown that the figure may be as high as 40% if the range of learning difficulties; cognitive, physical and other sensory difficulties are taken into account. The main difficulties facing deaf children can include, poor acoustic conditions – which may act to a deaf child like stairs to a child who uses a wheelchair – difficulties in language acquisition and development and poorer access to informal learning opportunities which can affect a child’s social and emotional development.

2. Inclusion

The Society is disappointed by the definition of inclusion so far adopted by Government. Its definition conflates placement in mainstream schools (integration) with placement in a learning environment, which is able to cater to the needs of individual children. Whilst we support deaf children being educated alongside their hearing peers, (so long as this appropriately supported and involves equal access to the activities of the school), we believe that this is not right for every deaf child and that a small but significant minority will need a more dedicated and specialist environment of a kind only available in a school for deaf pupils.

We recommend that the Assembly consider the definition of inclusion similar to that in the Tomlinson report as a basis for future work. NDCS is on the point of finalising Quality Standards for deaf pupils in inclusion, which we will be happy to share with you some time during the autumn term. We recommend a wider and more holistic model of inclusion which is based on achievement (in terms of personal effectiveness, emotional self-reliance, confidence around deaf identity) and participation as well as attainment (academic achievement).
The Society is supportive of the guidance in the Code of Practice, which stresses the need for a continuum of provision, which may include placement in out of area schools for deaf children with residential facilities.

3. Communication and Language

The Society would like to see more accurate measures of the achievements of deaf children in terms of academic work and acquisition of language and communication skills. This, in turn, will depend on development of appropriate assessment tools and staff expertise in administering them and drawing right conclusions.

All staff and parents will need to be skilled in appropriate communication skills and to keep abreast of developments in the social and educational effects of deafness.

The UNESCO (Salamanca) statement makes reference to the particular needs of deaf children and recognises their special circumstances in relation to a country’s indigenous sign language. We believe that commitment to the Salamanca Agreement should not be selective and the Government’s espousal of it should not preclude Paragraph 21 which enjoins signatories to ensure that deaf children have access to education in their indigenous sign languages. This should be a guarantee for all parents and young people who choose to have such access.

4. Regional Organisation

Although not specifically mentioned in the Assembly document, the Society would welcome the benefits that regional collaboration and planning could deliver for deaf children and their families.

In particular, we would advocate models, which move beyond an initial planning focus to a wider brief for provision and practice, especially for children with complex needs. Only then can regional collaboration deliver real benefits in terms of geographical equality and value for money. I attach a copy of a model of regional co-ordination for deaf children, which we believe, could be adapted for other low-incidence SEN areas. This is to be debated by the current regional pilots in England and the DfEE run National Steering Committee on Regional Co-ordination. **We recommend consideration of this and that the Assembly discusses this with the Wales Advisory Group for SEN (WAGSEN).**

Provision for deaf children is specialist and part of a complex national web. Any arrangements for regional collaboration need to take into account the national picture in terms of need and provision. We advocate the development of a national framework for deaf education and standards against which regional and local provision can be monitored.

5. Resource Implications

For standards in education provision for deaf education to reach satisfactory levels, the NDCS believes that specific targeted resourcing will be necessary. In particular, the Government needs to provide appropriate funding for:
- Regional hearing assessment centres (HACs) providing early diagnosis and high quality follow-up services to parents, including help to parents to develop their child’s early communication skills.

- Training in a variety of communication methods to suit oral/aural and signing deaf children and the social, educational and developmental effects of deafness for parents and a range of professionals.

- An entitlement for all SEN pupils to have their needs met and for those children at Stage III (or Support Plus) of the school-based stages of assessment to have access to appropriate support.

- Extending the scope of mandatory qualifications for specialist teachers and addressing the national shortage of teachers of the deaf.

- A strong SEN input to ITT and training for learning support staff, governors, current mainstream teachers, educational psychologists and OHMCI inspectors.

- A steady and adequate supply of specialist speech and language therapists and sufficient funding to meet deaf children’s speech and language therapy needs.

- Appropriately staffed and resourced hearing impaired/sensory support services. In particular we believe that there should be no further delegation of Potential Schools Budget (PSB) funds, which is threatening the existence of such services. LEAs need to keep back sufficient funds to run units and provide good quality service-wide back up arrangements, which can also take advantage of economies of scale and effectively recycle support and equipment to where it is most needed.

- We recommend that the Government consider the introduction of a funding system where the assessor agency is separate from the providing agency – similar to that operated by the FEFC Wales. This may have particular benefits in removing the local conflict for children requiring out of area placement and may have a role to play in arrangements for regional collaboration.

6. National Policy on SEN

The Society believes there needs to be a separate national policy on the education of deaf children, which outlines entitlement and sets national standards for delivery. We believe our Quality Standards may serve this purpose and will be seeking Assembly approval for them.

7. Parental preference/choice

Whilst the Society approves the extension of choices for deaf children within the mainstream, (and we note the effective veto a parent may have over a special school placement), we recommend that parents be given an equivalent veto over a mainstream placement. We believe that there needs to be parity of choice.

We also believe that parents should have a choice about who the most appropriate Named Person should be.
NDCS response

1.1 Early Identification: Early tears development groups

Advances in medical technology now mean that there is the potential for neonatal screening to detect congenital hearing loss within days of birth. The main recommendation of a recent report by the Medical Research Council (MRC), Institute of Hearing Research is that a national screening programme for hearing loss be established within general child screening practices. This is to be followed by an infant distraction test at seven months for those not identified or who miss neonatal screening.

Early identification of deaf children has significant implications for pre-school provision. Parents will need clear, high quality information and advice and children need specialist input to develop language at an early stage. These early stages are key to language acquisition for deaf children and are critical if they are to develop to keep abreast of hearing peers.

The Society supports the MRC’s recommendation but is aware that early identification centres of excellence have disappeared or been depleted in recent years with the result that support for families of deaf children has been variable across the country. This situation needs to be urgently addressed to ensure that there exists across the country facilities for identifying and supporting deaf children right from the start.

We endorse the principle of early years development groups but consider that they will need to consider how Early Years Development Plans will apply to deaf children. We are concerned that the specific needs associated with deafness and access to the curriculum will become lost or diminished within a generic service/local Early Years Centre and therefore recommend that centres or services should involve professionals with expertise in deafness.

We strongly recommend that in the interests of true partnership, parents be invited or co-opted onto early years development groups and that their voice is heard with EYDPs.

We strongly recommend the need for regional hearing loss assessment centres, which focus on providing the earliest possible diagnosis and high quality follow-up/support services to children and families who have received a diagnosis.

We envisage that regional centres, operating under a national code of practise, could involve local health and social service providers referring parents to LEAs and notifying them of non-maintained schools for deaf children (and the full range of early years options) and to NDCS for information and advocacy support. We would like to see a legal duty on children’s services to provide post-diagnosis support in terms of the educational, social and developmental implications of deafness.

1.2 Regional Planning

The willingness by WAGSEN to consider greater regional co-ordination for children with low-incidence disability is welcomed. We are optimistic that this could lead to better planning and a wider range of school options from which parents can express an informed preference.
The creation of unitary authorities has often led to a “go it alone” approach which has actively discouraged the sharing of resources. In some cases this approach has acted to curtail parent choices in educational placement and the provision to be specified in statements.

1.3 National Curriculum (NC)

Previous attempts at assessing schools’ performance have been based on crude data which has allowed little scope for assessing “value added”. In particular, experience indicates that there needs to be more accurate measures of the achievements of deaf children and measures of the achievements of deaf children and measures of their progress.

We are aware that assessment under the NC is at times incapable of assessing and recognising the abilities of deaf children who use signing or BSL as their first language. Many language-based tests are insufficient to measure the true cognitive abilities of deaf children. The result can often be inappropriate or even under-challenging curricula are devised.

We would therefore recommend that educational psychologists, mainstream teachers, teachers of the deaf and speech and language therapists be:

- Required to be aware of appropriate assessment tools, (perhaps via the proposed National Institute for SEN), both language based and those which are more visually orient ed, provided with training in their effective implementation and on how to draw the right conclusions.

- Provided with training in communication skills (appropriate signing, oral or other appropriate methods) and the educational and social implications of deafness.

A working group has recently been established under the auspices of the annual conference of heads of hearing/sensory impaired services to develop a national framework for the assessment of deaf children’s signing skills/language development. This group could form a useful basis for developments in this area working with the DfEE and Welsh Assembly to develop and disseminate such national criteria.

1.4 School improvement/target setting

We would welcome a commitment to value of the voice of the pupil and parent in target setting, yet the Code of Practise emphasises the importance of the views of the pupils and parents in terms of their having practical information and of their right to be involved in matters which affect them.

We recommend that parents and pupils be involved in individual target setting.

We strongly recommend that schools are encouraged to develop targets, which measure individual achievements, and attainments and strengths as well as areas of the curriculum where they need to develop and improve. Targets which focus on year group or global expectations or a child’s limitations may damage a child’s confidence in their ability to learn, whereas individual and criterion referenced targets which help to exhibit strengths and “distance travelled” will be
more meaningful and satisfying to parents and may motivate pupils towards success in other areas of the curriculum. Whole group targets may also divert resources away from individual needs.

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly consults with specific disability/SEN groups to develop effective and achievable targets. We recommend that Government fund research to identify and develop procedures for target setting and allow analysis and dissemination of good practice which focuses on individual achievements. There is also a risk that the needs of deaf children who fall within the group not expected to reach the Welsh Office literacy and numeracy targets will be overlooked in literacy and numeracy teaching strategies, programmes and education funding which is aimed at the majority and may encourage teachers to "teach to the test". This will help neither the more able deaf (and hearing) children nor those deaf children who operate at a slower pace.

There is however a serious lack of information regarding levels of attainment and achievement among deaf children, particularly those being educated in mainstream LEA provision. It is therefore not possible for LEAs to identify with any degree of confidence, good or bad practice. Nor is it possible for LEAs to compare the performance of the deaf children for whom they are responsible with that of other deaf and hearing children in other areas. In the absence of such data, LEAs could become complacent about the services that they provide for deaf children, and due to the lack of accountability, may in some instances opt for less effective patterns of provision and support. This may be compounded by budgetary constraints. There is therefore an urgent need for LEAs to collate existing information and make it available to interested parties. This would allow parents and professionals to raise questions about apparent general under-achievement.

The NDCS is part of a consortium of voluntary and professional organisations concerned with standards in the education of deaf children and the attainments/achievements of these children. The consortium is very concerned about attainments/achievements and the priority given to deaf education and has developed a research brief and identified an agency to conduct the research. We strongly recommend Government funding for this vital work which will benefit Government, LEAs, professionals, parents and the ultimate consumers, deaf children themselves.

We believe it is crucial that inspectors are provided with knowledge about the educational, social and developmental implications of deafness. They will need appropriate communication skills and awareness of how to work with sign language interpreters or communicators. This will help inspectors to help deaf children and staff to have full and equal access to the inspection process.

1.5 Information Communications Technology (ICT)

ICT has a particular importance for deaf children and others who experience communication difficulties. Technology is important to children regardless of whether they are being educated through oral/aural methods and may be able to use speech output systems or whether they use British Sign Language (BSL) and may benefit from developing their language through BSL and English related software packages.
In addition, we recommend that all schools with deaf children should have a text telephone, fax, CD Rom and video telephone. This would provide educators with an opportunity to introduce keyboard skills at the earliest possible stage for each child. There should also be national and international link-ups with the Internet and a phased introduction of video telephony, especially for deaf children in rural areas and also because deaf children lose out on foreign language exchange schemes/visits.

We would like to see a national body (perhaps BECTA?) develop; a service to offer best purchase advice to schools on appropriate software and technology. NDCS Technology Office can offer parents and professionals advice on best purchase of equipment and software. By consulting with BECTA, NDCS and others, schools could avoid a situation where they have invested in inappropriate technology or equipment which may be suitable for tasks in hand but which few, if any staff know how to operate.

We strongly recommend to you the DfEE current work with Deafax, NDCS and other organisations in the deafness field which is looking at developing a national policy on ICT and deaf pupils which will aim to equalise positively access to appropriate ICT to get access to the curriculum, raise standards and achieve in line with actual ability. We have written to you separately on this issue.

1.6 School examinations

We recommend that all schools should be made aware of special assessment arrangements in exams (whether yearly tests, SATS or GCSE) for pupils with SEN. We would commend to the Department the guidelines agreed by the Joint Council for GCSE which allow (at the discretion of school staff who apply on the candidate’s behalf) up to 25% extra time, questions in modified language and communication support (where this would not afford the deaf candidate an advantage over hearing peers) such as lip-speaker or sign language interpreter.

1.7 Schools Access Fund

The society is pleased to see that the SAF is set to double. However there seems to be no mention of this a propos Wales. Access to mainstream schools has unique implications for deaf children who will need equipment, staffing and infrastructure. Given the number of children with SEN and the different types of disability, demand will soon outstrip the modest supply of funds. We recommend that more resources should be placed into educational, physical and social access for deaf children and that this be done as part of an ongoing, phased, national plan.

2. Working with Parents.

2.1 Entitlement and Choice: making informed choices.

NDCS maintains a policy of a parental right to choose a communication method and hence a type of school for their child. Such decisions should be made upon the basis of clear, high quality and impartial information on the full range of options to enable parents to express an
informed choice. The concerns of parents need to be listened to and it is our experience that many lack adequate awareness of help and provision available during the school-based stages of assessment.

We recommend that strengthening in Regulations and guidance of the parental right to receive information which will need to be adequate in scope and impartial. They also need to be made aware of their rights at all stages of assessment this thinking should be brought into Regulations covering the conduct of assessments at the school-based and statutory stages.

Whilst we recognise the contribution of SNAP in parent support, we are firmly of the belief that parents should have a right to choose who they consider to be the most specialist or appropriate Named Person or Independent Parental Supporter. For instance, NDCS will often be the most relevant organisation for parents of deaf children (with and without Statements).

We believe there is a need for alternative methods of funding involving a clear separation of assessment and funding/placing decisions. The Society would like to see an investigation of funding approaches similar to that of FEFC Wales which makes independent funding decisions based upon professional assessment and the views of the family/young person concerned.

For parents who are seeking a mainstream placement, we welcome positive statements about further moves to integration. However, we fundamentally challenge the strong assumption throughout the document that mainstream education should always be the first option and can be made right for all children with special educational needs. Indeed there is an assumption in the document that pupils will have to experience failure in mainstream before a specialist placement will be considered.

Incidentally, figures from biennial surveys of the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf consistently show that the vast majority, (over 90%) of deaf children are already being educated in mainstream schools. We believe this could well represent a natural plateau. This compares very favourably with pupils with physical and cognitive SENs.

2.2 Enhancing partnerships.

Information on voluntary groups which offer advocacy or a Named person service need to be made available to parents. Despite the advice in the Code of Practice, NDCS is aware that the vast majority of parents contacting our Information and Helpline services (thousands every year) have been referred by other parents or have chanced upon the Society through local information directories.

Support from voluntary groups (which can help parents to understand the law, education processes and their role) at the earliest possible opportunity may help head off or defuse conflict between professional and parents. Access to advocacy support and good quality, unbiased and timely information may prevent parental anxiety and the suspicion that LEAs are acting unilaterally and without regard to parental viewpoints and observations.

It is very disappointing to see that there is no mention in the BEST for Wales and Shaping the Future of a proposal to establish parent partnership Schemes in Wales. We strongly recommend that these be set up and that they should work with but enjoy real independence.
from LEAs. Staff running these schemes should have expertise in deafness. Voluntary organisations may be well placed to run such schemes.

NDCS head office and regional staff already fulfil this function for many parents who are aware of it due to involvement with their local Deaf Children’s Society (DCS). We believe that LEAs should be required to inform parents of deaf children of the range of advocacy services available such as that offered by NDCS.

Across the country the Society trains and supports Named Persons as do many of our local groups, often funded via Standards Funding. Such schemes need funding to thrive and offer a service to families. In particular, we recommend that these funds be extended to enable such schemes to be set up and developed in each LEA.

Many deaf parents have deaf children. We believe that deaf parents should have equal access to the range of information about assessment/statementing together with their rights and choices.

We recommend that LEAs and providing agencies be required under legislation to provide accessible information to deaf parents which could consist of communication support at meetings, e.g. case conferences and annual review meetings, and literature in plain language.

In addition consideration needs to be given to deaf and hearing parents from ethnic community groups whose home language is not English. School policies will need to consider how they will make full partnership and involvement work for parents who have English as a second language.

We have been very supportive of the system of independent SEN appeal introduced by the Education Act 1993 (superseded by the 1996 Act). However, the system is hampered by a tribunal’s inability to specify when a decision should be carried out. In some cases this had meant an inordinate delay in placing a child in a residential school. In more serious cases, parents have been awarded entitlement via Parts II and III of the Statement access to vital provision, namely speech and language therapy, to improve articulation and help develop language, which has never been implemented and which now requires the parents to resort to yet another potentially lengthy appeal to the Secretary of State for Education under Section 497 of the Education Act 1996.

NDCS recommends that SEN Tribunal regulations be amended to enable tribunals to set reasonable timescales for the implementation of decisions. This is to be included in a revised Code of Practice for England and we would like to see the same apply in Wales. A timescale could be set following consultation with parents and the LES/service provider.

Summer Literacy and family Literacy Schemes need to be accessible to parents, (especially deaf parents) and deaf children. This will call for information to be given in BSL, on video (signed and subtitled), plain English, text telephones, appropriate acoustic conditions, amplification technology, appropriate health and safety measures and sufficient numbers of appropriately experienced and qualified staff, including specialist teachers of the deaf and other professionals with an ability to use appropriate communication methods and an understanding of the educational, social and developmental implications of deafness. Further Education Strategic Plans should include a separate component dealing with the needs of deaf children. Similarly, Education and Training Groups will need to consider how policies could improve standards for deaf children specifically.
3. **Practical Support: the framework for provision.**

3.1 **The Code of Practice and School-based Stages**

NDCS believes that there needs to be an entitlement to provision for deaf pupils who do not have a Statement, especially in terms of equipment and ICT for children with lower degrees of hearing loss.

3.2 **Statements: the need for a SEN matrix and tiers of funding.**

NDCS would welcome national criteria for the issue of a Statement. The Code of Practice offers a model, which could be built upon. However, the Society would insist that such criteria should contain a separate section dealing with criteria for deaf children who have specific needs around access to the curriculum. Perhaps this could be addressed in a review of the Code?

3.3 NDCS recommends greater opportunities for parents and deaf people to have access to training to become registered lay inspectors.

3.4 NDCS believes that LEAs should be required by law to monitor schools’ implementation of Statements and individual educational plans (IEP) and how much of delegated budgets are being spent on specific educational needs.

3.5 NDCS is very concerned by the proposal that Statements of children placed in special schools be exempted from the recommendation in the Code of Practice that Provision be "specific, detailed and quantified". Not all provision will be made on-site at all schools for deaf children and a level of detail is often required to provide teaching, non-teaching and care staff with the guidance they need to help them meet individual SENs. Without such detail, then neither LEAs nor the tribunal service will be able to make comparative assessments of the costs of schools and make fair decisions about value for money and the efficient use of resources as required by law. Paragraph 4:28 of the Code of Practice needs to be maintained for all Statements.

If there is a possibility that for some deaf children, placement in a schools for deaf pupils will be a temporary measure until they can be returned to the mainstream, then such detailed guidance may be needed for mainstream school staff and to ease the transition from one learning environment to another.

3.6 Whilst we can appreciate that there may, on occasions, be sufficient evidence to discontinue a Statement, there needs to be a recognition that this should be done only when professionals and parents agree that needs have been met. There should be evidence that the child’s progress would be neither halted nor reversed if the support was to be reduced or withdrawn completely.

Moreover, NDCS has evidence that LEAs are proposing to “cease to maintain Statements” inappropriately. The Society has evidence of LEAs passing responsibility to FEFCW inappropriately in some cases because of the confusion over statements and subsequent responsibility. There needs to be a clear division of responsibility between LEAs and FEFCW for funding 16-19 FE in specialist colleges as recommended by the Tomlinson Committee.
3.7 We are particularly concerned that some LEAs are reluctant to issue Statements for children under 2. Whilst we recognise that the Code states that these will be rare, this should not be taken as pretext to deny families the earliest possible intervention.

In some LEAs, we are aware that no peripatetic service is offered to children under the age of two, children for whom the early years are crucial in terms of receptive and expressive language. We therefore recommend that the provision of appropriate support, including help from peripatetic teacher of the deaf be mandatory for all deaf children under school age.

3.8 It is often difficult to obtain specialist advice and input at the early stages of the Code of Practice. However, such input may obviate the need for a Statement or more costly provision later in the child’s life at school. Support for specialists may also be a means of enhancing mainstream provision and the capacity of a school to meet need.

3.9 We are delighted to see in the original Green Paper the statement that "Funding should follow needs; it should not drive provision".

4 Inclusion

Principles of Inclusion

4.1 The proposals in the Green Paper are based around a narrow model of integration rather than a broader and more welcome definition of inclusion as developed in the Tomlinson Report. Over 90% of deaf children are being educated in the mainstream. We would caution against pressure to increase this figure, preferring instead access to a continuum of appropriate provision which meets individual children’s needs.

“...inclusive learning is not synonymous with integration. It is a larger and prior concept. The first step is to determine the best possible learning environment...We envisage a system that is inclusive and that will require many mansions’. (Our emphasis).

4.2 We welcome any proposals to extend choices of local mainstream schools. This will mean that parents are to be given an effective veto over a special school if a mainstream placement for parents of deaf/disabled children who are seeking placement in a specialist school and who have sufficiently high levels of needs to warrant this.

The Society is concerned by the perception of some LEAs that the placement in units for deaf children, out of area LEA-maintained schools and non-maintained and independent schools for deaf children can be too expensive. Unit provision can provide good value for money yet some children find themselves denied this provision because they are not profoundly deaf. The level of hearing loss should not be the main or sole factor when deciding on unit placement but rather the benefit to a child and consideration of their individual needs. The difficulties faced by children with moderate or severe hearing loss may be significant enough to warrant placement in a unit.

We also know of LEAs whose policy is not to resort to any out of area placements. In theory, this counter to advise in the Code of Practice concerning a continuum of provision. Such practice is especially worrying in view of the proposed transfer of approval to admit children
with Statements into non-maintained and independent special schools form the Secretary of State to individual LEAs. Provision of some central funding for non-maintained and independent schools for deaf children which offer regional planning and allow true comparative placement costs to be considered in discussion about individual placements and regional planning.

For those deaf children who are progressing within mainstream education, we would strongly support any measure which promote effective collaboration between special school staff, mainstream staff (including those based in units) and those working in HI or sensory support services.

We are pleased to see that the individual needs of the child will be paramount and would like to see a recognition in any draft legislation that children may need different types of education at different stages of their educational career. We know of children who have managed well in mainstream primary but who have needed extra input and from a unit to focus on specific curriculum support of language input. Equally, some children have benefited from dedicated learning environment of a school for deaf pupils to help them reach their potential at secondary age or even later.

It is unfortunate that some young people have had to endure the isolation and lack of appropriate input and stimulation in ineffective mainstream provision, identified as "mainstream features" when it is too late. It is even more poignant that few of these young people are able to gain places at sixth forms or colleges for deaf young people to enable them to acquire the relevant skills for independence and employment.

We are aware that more thought needs to be given to how special and mainstream schools will work together to provide greater access to the National Curriculum.

A particularly important aspect of education for any young person is the development of self-esteem. For deaf children, much of this hinges around good communication skills and positive development and appreciation of a deaf identity. The latter is often dependent on an adequate and age-appropriate deaf peer group, deaf aware staff and ongoing access to deaf culture and deaf adult role models in education settings. Those children who are unable to experience academic and social success and opportunities for leadership in the mainstream are unlikely to develop these attributes.

It is well documented that behavioural difficulties in deaf children are often attributable to poor language acquisition and negative childhood experiences involving peers or professionals who are ignorant of communication needs and strategies.

Sometimes, placements may appear successful however, the NDCS has represented several families at SEN tribunal whose children received glowing reports from school despite failing academically and being isolated socially. It is important that the child’s own views are examined carefully in view of the difficulties involved in providing full access to the curriculum and the life of the school. Often the quiet child who turns inward but who keeps a low profile may be seen to be succeeding compared with a child who expresses frustration due to poor access to the curriculum and is labelled as failing or problematic and worthy of consideration for a more specialist provision/placement.
5 Planning SEN provision.

The Regional Dimension.

5.1 The NDCS supports any wish by WAGSEN to develop greater regional co-ordination for children with low incidence disabilities which could increase parental choices and improve SEN planning. It is, however, unrealistic to assume that regional planning will happen on a purely voluntary basis: Funding mechanisms and incentives will be a necessary component of regional planning arrangements.

5.2 We believe that intent needs to be matched by action. Experience indicates that appropriate funding incentives need to be available to enable regional co-ordination to work.

5.3 A new role for Special Schools.

We are pleased to see that non-maintained and independent special schools are to be involved in regional planning and the delivery of services. It is important, however, that cross-regional and national functions of some schools for deaf children are recognised in planning.

6 Developing staff skills

6.1 Training and professional development of teachers.

The NDCS strongly supports the Government’s intention to retain mandatory specialist teaching qualifications. We would recommend that mandation needs to be extended to other specific disability groups and could be addressed as part of continuing professional development. This may act to motivate and retain staff by providing a more definite career structure.

Moreover, we do not wish to see the mandatory teacher of the deaf qualification replaced or diluted by a generic SEN qualification. The Society believes that skills, knowledge and expertise of teachers of the deaf in other disability areas should be acquired through a structured programme of continuing professional development. This is consistent with the Government’s wishes for serving teachers.

The Government needs to take urgent steps to address the shortfall in teachers of the deaf nationally by ensuring that funding and support is available for teachers who wish to train. In addition, end-on training should be reconsidered for those teachers who wish to specialise early in their careers. This would also help to bring down the age profile for teachers of the deaf and ensure a supply of qualified staff into the future.

We would not, however, wish to see a situation where children become overly dependent on a visiting specialist once a week. It is therefore vital that mainstream school staff are given the skills and expertise to identify deaf children and to know, sometimes after consultation with key professionals, how to support them within school.

Steps also need to be taken to ensure that skilled and able deaf people are able to contribute to the education of deaf children as teachers and educators. The NDCS would like to see the removal of the artificial and unjust obstacles facing deaf candidates for ITT in Circular 13/93 relating to medical fitness to teach.
6.2 Initial teacher training/induction.

We welcome proposals to prioritise SEN in initial teacher training. We recommend the recent SENTC proposals for consideration as a package that could be introduced in ITT establishments.

6.3 Learning Support Assistants

The NDCS welcomed the proposal to create a framework for Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). Further investigation is needed to establish how to benefit from the skills of LSAs, so that they may, for example, be trained and recruited to specific posts working with deaf children (requiring job descriptions), develop their own professional body and develop a career structure.

We recommend that LSAs will need initial training and continuing professional development on the range of communication skills with deaf children so that they can be deployed flexibly and help to extend communication choices within an area. We believe that sufficient funding needs to be made available to ensure ongoing training for LSA.

6.4 Governors

The NDCS welcomes the proposal to introduce governor training. A great shift of responsibility from LEAs to governing was not matched by comparable back-up/training. NDCS is able to offer training in the needs of deaf children to governing bodies and school staff.

6.5 Educational Psychologists.

We welcome proposals on training for SENCOs and Educational Psychologists (EPs). Such staff need knowledge and expertise in using appropriate assessment methods, communication with deaf children, classroom practice in managing the effects of hearing loss and writing reports which are intelligible to parents. However, there are serious questions concerning the training of SENCOs to take over many assessment responsibilities from EPs.

We would like to see guidance from Government a clear acknowledgement that Educational Psychologists are free to state their own professional opinion after careful weighing of the evidence and should not be subject to undue influence from LEA Education Officers who may be motivated to prioritise budgets over real needs.

6.6 Overall, we welcome proposed moves to extend opportunities for staff development across the SEN sector but we would point out that NDCS and non-maintained and independent schools for deaf pupils have much to offer in this area.

6.7 NDCS recommends that LEAs and schools provide funding incentives to enable schools to employ deaf adults. As with deaf teachers, they could work alongside hearing teachers of the deaf to provide positive role models, help with language and personal development.
7 Working together

7.1 NDCS supports the plan to conduct and disseminate research into good practice in terms of working together to meet needs. The Society and other organisations concerned with deafness would welcome the opportunity to have input into any investigations. We recommend that research should aim to identify good practice, which relates specifically to deaf children. There will need to be links with regional offices concerned with low-incidence disabilities. We also support the proposal for a separate SEN advisory Group in Wales with the same remit as its English counterpart but required to work closely with it to share information and good practice.

7.2 As stated earlier in paragraph 1.5 above (dealing with school improvements/target setting), we recommend Government funding for research into the attainments/achievements of deaf children.

7.3 Responsibility for speech and language therapy (SALT), despite a clear legal distinction in the Lancashire Ruling (1989) and the Code’s distinction between primary and ultimate responsibility, continues to be a contentious issue. Deaf children’s Statements commonly specify SALT in Parts V and VI (non-educational needs and provision). Yet language acquisition and development are the building blocks for all learning and deaf children’s needs are rarely for the purposes of restoring speech following accident, illness, injury or because they lack the physical ability to articulate sound due to disfigurement.

We would like to see a clear commitment, which clarifies this responsibility, whichever of the two funding models in the document is used. Where the need for therapy is educational, provision should be statutory.

We are pleased to see a proposal to address the prior problem of the shortage of speech and language therapists and would recommend that this is extended to include a sufficient number of therapists with the Additional Clinical Skills Certificate in administering speech and language therapy to deaf children and a sufficient number who are able to assess the needs of signing deaf children.

Whilst we recognise that teachers and LSAs can play an important part in delivering speech and language therapy, there needs to be a recognition some deaf children will need this to be delivered in individual and small group sessions with a specialist therapist.

7.4 We are glad to see that the Welsh Assembly Office is to address other therapies. A large number of deaf children have additional needs.

7.5 Training for teachers with careers responsibilities and careers service officers, generic and specialist. Currently there is a shortage of careers officers with communication skills to deal with interviews and providing services for deaf young people and parents, especially those who use BSL or a sign support system. Improved training in the educational, vocational, occupational and social needs of deaf people and interpreter support services could aid transition arrangements at the end of compulsory schooling.

7.6 Children and young people can and should be encouraged to offer information on how they think their needs can best be met and their preferences in terms of placement. We also believe that young people will be more able to make a smooth and successful transition to
post-16 education, training or employment if they are involved in decision making from an early age. Professionals will need training and opportunities to update advocacy skills which enable children and young people to speak for themselves and outline their wishes in an age-appropriate way. Very young children can be encouraged to indicate whether they are happy or not with proposals – simply pointing to smiley face graphics can indicate happiness or lack of it with any decisions being made about them!

8. Emotional and behavioural difficulties

8.1 NDCS is concerned about pupils who are effectively excluded not because of difficult behaviour but because local mainstream options cannot offer sufficient support/expertise.

8.2 We strongly recommend training for staff to understand and act appropriately to communication needs and the connections between lack of language and EBD. School staff will need to have skills to work effectively with parents, (mainly through good practice in home – school liaison and the use of behavioural programmes for use at home, which encourage more positive behaviours and self-esteem, positive deaf identity). Sign language and communication skills for hearing pupils could be addressed throughout the NC and school curriculum. This would help governors to meet their legal duty to ensure that children with SEN join in the life of the school.

8.3 Strengthening staff skills/disseminating best practice specialist support.

The NDCS believes that staff working with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) will need relevant in-service training and non-contact time to allow them to take advice from relevant specialists. NDCS can refer professionals with an understanding of deafness who are working in the area of mental health.

8.4 It is our experience that the majority of deaf children with EBDX experience this as a response to ineffective communication or placement, or even mainstream where there has been insufficient communication support. Once the communication environment has been addressed then such behaviour may disappear altogether or be slightly reduced. We would therefore, be very sceptical of a return to mainstream once the presenting difficulty had been addressed or worked through.

9. Funding and the SEN framework

9.1 We are pleased to see that Statements will be expected to be clear about provision to be made by the school and that which is to be provided by the LEA. However, we are opposed to any further delegation of the Potential Schools Budget.

Almost total delegation of support services in some LEAs has resulted in inflexibility or the locking-in of resources into one school’s units and resource bases, thus isolating staff and pupils. It is more difficult to recycle or redirect human, technical and other resources to where the help is needed, which may extend to children at Stage III of the school-based stages of assessment. NDCS is therefore opposed to any further delegation of central support services for deaf children and looks towards greater co-operation between schools or clusters of schools and the process of regionalisation for a solution to the problem.
9.2 We believe that LEAs should also be required to monitor funds delegated to units for deaf pupils attached to mainstream schools. This would enable authorities to ensure that unit funding and other funds intended for children with SEN is not vired for other more general purposes within or outside a unit.
THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

i) EDUCATION FOR PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

The value of educational provision for children of three and four years of age has been attested in a number of studies.

It is generally agreed that the aims of such provision should focus on five major areas of children’s development:

- Social and emotional development
- Intellectual development
- Aesthetic development
- Physical development
- Creation of effective transition from home to school

Various studies suggest that teachers and advisors place the greatest importance on social and emotional development. This was a finding of the first large-scale attempt to research into the aims of nursery education by Taylot, Exon and Holley (1972). The same emphasis emerged from the 1997 survey of current practice in Wales into Baseline Assessment conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) for the Assessment and Curriculum Authority for Wales (ACCAC) when the majority opinion of educators was that emotional and social development should be an essential part of any statutory baseline assessment of children on their entry to formal schooling.

The reason for this emphasis is clear. Before children can benefit from formal classroom instruction they must be able to accept a new school environment and operate in it, attend to their physical and hygienic needs, cooperate with other children, and be able to concentrate on tasks. While children may develop some of these skills in the home, circumstances in many families mean that only the nursery classroom with the guidance of a specialised teacher can provide the opportunities for ensuring the social and emotional development of all children at this key age.

Another prerequisite for children’s effective learning in the classroom is the need for adequate linguistic skills. At the age of three and four, especially in homes where little oral communication takes place and where books are scarce, many children have underdeveloped language. This reveals itself in limited vocabulary, unclear pronunciation, and difficulty in forming meaningful utterances. All children, and these in particular, need an enriching linguistic environment with regular opportunity for talk, and where stories and song are part of the everyday experience. This can be best provided in nursery classes.

Bilingualism in Welsh and English is part of the cultural heritage of all children in Wales, and is also an increasingly important economic qualification. Nursery education providing early contact with Welsh is the ideal basis for Welsh-medium education for children from non-Welsh speaking backgrounds. A range of studies in various countries have shown that early exposure to a second language gives such “immersion” children the best chance of attaining fluency in the second language. Welsh-medium schools report that such children entering at the age of five after one or two years in a Welsh-medium nursery or playgroup settle more quickly and make greater progress than children who have not had that opportunity.
Nursery education also provides opportunities for children to develop more general intellectual skills. They can be guided to develop their curiosity and channel this into exploration. They grow in independence and in their ability to assess evidence and make decisions on the basis of that evidence. They learn concepts such as place, size and time which help them to organise their environment and make sense of the world.

Through ensuring similar experiences for all children, educational provision for three and four-year olds will help reduce the inequalities existing between children from culturally and economically rich and impoverished homes. It will help children from less fortunate backgrounds to take better advantage of formal schooling after the age of five.

One of the less satisfactory aspects of pre-school provision in Wales at present is its inconsistency. There are considerable regional differences across Wales in the availability, starting age and quality of nursery provision, both in the LEA sector and under other providers. More consistency in provision would ensure greater fairness in educational opportunity for all children across Wales.

The content of nursery education

There is much current interest in what the actual content of nursery education should be and how much formal teaching should occur there. This is not surprising given recent developments in pre-school policy such as the increasing admission of four-year-olds to reception classes, the introduction of the Desirable Learning Outcomes (ACCAC 1996), inspection of pre-school settings and the introduction of statutory Baseline Assessment (ACCAC 1998).

Few studies address the important issue of the effects of different pre-school curricula and how pre-school experiences affect children’s later performance in school. One overview of such studies in the United States is offered by Bob Slavin (Slavin et al., 1989). This concludes that the main characteristics of effective pre-school programmes is that they “... tend to emphasise exploration, language development and play, not academics.” An overview of US research on reading by Jeff McQuillan (McQuillan 1998) states that children who can read before they start formal school usually come from homes where books are available and where parents support their reading, although not by the formal strategies used in schools. McQuillan also reviews evidence from a small number of experimental studies of US children taught formally to read at an early age. These showed that any advantage was short-lived and that later starters had usually caught up around age eight. He concludes that early access to books with supportive adults is the key factor, rather than early formal teaching of reading skills.

A report by Clare and David Mills (Mills and Mills, 1998), featured in a Channel 4 Dispatches programme, compared early childhood approaches in England with those in Hungary, German Switzerland and Flanders. The three continental countries all have a later school starting age – six – and their pre-school approach concentrates on children’s social skills, developing attention span, listening and memory, behaviour and concepts. These systems do not teach reading, writing or written number until children are six because they believe that many children are too immature to cope with these skills earlier. Forcing them to do so would begin a cycle of educational failure. The authors conclude that the present early years strategy in England may be detrimental to children’s development.
To summarise existing research, children aged five and under seem to do better when they have opportunities to socialise, make their own choices and take responsibility for their own learning. Emphasis on spoken language and understanding of basic cognitive concepts, such as time, space and number, are recommended, as are access to books and to people who read to them. More formal, academic, teaching does not appear to ensure long-term gains in educational performance.

ii) THE EFFECT OF EXPANDING PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION

The main form of pre-school arrangement for children under the age of five in Wales is LEA nursery provision, but other forms include early admission into primary schools, playgroups, private nurseries and child minders. Within each of these broad categories there is a range of different services offering various degrees of early education and/or daycare.

The establishment of Early Years Development Partnerships and Plans has improved the coordination of services. These have arisen from the Government target to provide a free early education place for every four-year-old.

Where LEAs in Wales currently provide nursery education, there may be little room for expansion, although increasing the number of pre-school children receiving nursery education in the LEA area would be one aim. Extension of the provision would therefore largely take place in those LEAs which may not yet have a fully-developed system. The effect of this would be to increase the current choice available to parents. In some areas it may become difficult for other providers to compete with well-resourced nursery classes under the LEA aegis. There will certainly be a need for closer coordination of all types of pre-school provision in each locality, and this would increase the importance of the role of the early Years Development Partnerships.

The cost implications of any expansion of pre-school provision would require serious research into present and proposed provision before attempting a cost analysis. It would be unwise to suggest even a ball-park figure at this stage.

The coordination of childcare and educational services for under-fives in Wales and England is the subject of a research project now being undertaken by the NFER. Its final report will be published in March 2000.

Sources

PLAS TAN YR ALLT - STEINER WALDORF SCHOOLS FELLOWSHIP

Our perception is that the separation of care from education is potentially very damaging, and especially so for children as young as thirty-six months. What our early years centres provide for three year olds is an educational environment that closely resembles a supportive family unit. Waldorf kindergartens take a holistic view of learning in line with current research which acknowledges that children who experience security, continuity, and care in their early years become good learners and well-adjusted adults. A quality learning environment with a strong emphasis on care benefits all young children and disadvantaged children in particular. Such ‘family oriented’ settings offer a qualitatively different experience for children from those settings in which educational targets alone set the agenda.

As part of our practice we work very closely with parents to support the child's transition from home to 'school' and we remain in close communication with parents at all times.

The Association of Steiner Waldorf Schools in the UK and Ireland

2.0 The Steiner Waldorf Curriculum

2.1 The Kindergarten (3-6 years)

Children enter the Kindergarten between the ages of three and six. Parent and toddler groups are provided for younger children. Group sizes vary. The ratio of adult to child is one to eight. Five sessions per week are offered, each session lasting for approximately four and a half hours. Children take up provision according to age and need. Afternoon care is available if required.

2.1.1 General Principles

Cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills are accorded equal value in Steiner Kindergartens and many different competencies are developed. Activities reflect the concerns, interests and developmental stages of the child and the carefully structured environment is designed to foster both personal and social learning.

Teaching is by example rather than by direct instruction and is integrated rather than subject-based. The curriculum is adapted to the child. In recognition of its vital role in early education, children are given time to play.

Emphasis is given to regular patterns of activities both within the day and over each week. A cyclical pattern is reflected in themes of work related to seasons of the year.

2.1.2 Aims and Objectives

The main aims of Steiner Waldorf early provision are:

- To recognise and support each stage of child development
- To provide opportunities for children to be active in meaningful imitation
2.1.3 The Nature of the Early Years

The physical, emotional and cognitive development of young children are subtly and inextricably linked. This view underpins and informs this early years curriculum. This educational philosophy springs from a recognition of three seven-years cycles of development, the first from birth to seven, the second from seven to fourteen and the third from fourteen to maturity at twenty one. The curriculum is tailored to meet the child’s changing needs during each phase.

At each stage, the child presents a particular set of physical, emotional and intellectual characteristics which require a particular (empathetic) educational response in return. This is the basis of child-centred education. The first phase, the formative period before second dentition, is seen as the period of greatest physical growth and development. Structures in the brain are being refined and elaborated, a process which is not completed until after the change of teeth, and until that time the young child’s primary mode of learning is through doing and experiencing - he or she ‘thinks’ with the entire physical being.

The nature of this early learning should be self-motivated, allowing the child to come to know the world in the way most appropriate to his or her age - through active feeling, touching, exploring and imitating, in other words, through doing. Only when new capabilities appear, at around the seventh year, are the children physically, emotionally and intellectually ready for formal instruction. Through experiential, self motivated physical activity the small child ‘grasps’ the world in order to understand it - an essential pre-requisite for the later activity of grasping the world through concepts. The children are expected to master physical skills before abstract intellectual ones.

2.1.4 Early Years Education

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE IN MEANINGFUL IMITATION

To complement the maturational timetable imitation is acknowledged as the prime means of children’s learning - hence adults in the Kindergartens teach by imitation and most of what children learn at this stage is imparted by example. The child learns for life from life (the acquisition of the mother tongue for example, takes place largely through imitation) and children model their behaviour on what happens around them. Adult activities stimulate direct responses in the young child and teachers carry out their daily tasks in such a way as to be worthy of imitation.

We are a community of ‘doers’ and we support our community through our work, for example by baking our own bread. The children are welcome, but not required to help. The activity of the teacher may inspire the children to become independently active, finding their own learning
situations in play. Children perceive and register everything we do - it isn't only what we do before the young child but also how we do it. Teachers are conscious of their own moral influence upon the child and of the development of good habits through imitation. We would expect to see a range of suitable activities for imitation taking place in our Kindergartens. These might include domestic tasks such as baking, cooking, cleaning, caring for the room etc. - all activities with a social, practical, moral and educational basis.

The forces of imitation, which are so important in helping the young child to know and understand the world in this first phase, naturally diminish and give way to a new kind of knowing which, as referred to earlier, appears at around the time of second dentition. This is the time when teaching 'by example' moves into more formal teaching by instruction. The curriculum changes as one phase of child development comes to a close and another begins. (There is a similar shift in the curriculum at age fourteen which corresponds to the changes which occur at puberty.)

**WORKING WITH RHYTHM AND REPETITION**

Steiner Waldorf Kindergartens identify rhythm as an important educational principle. Children need the reassurance of continuity and regular events mark the Kindergarten year, week and day. Seasonal activities celebrate the cycles of the year - autumn in Kindergarten might be a time for threshing and grinding and spring a time for planting. A 'seasonal area' reflects the changing natural world throughout the year, as do the themes of our songs, stories and poems. In addition, each week has its own regular rhythm of recurring activities i.e. baking day, painting day, gardening day.

Every day has its own smaller rhythms which support the day's activities. These daily rhythms help the child to feel secure and to know what to expect, a tidy up song, for example, might signal the end of one activity and the beginning of another. The day is structured so that there is a varied pace - with periods of contraction and expansion - providing a balance between times of activity and times of rest. In practice, this might mean that creative play would be followed by a more concentrated circle time, or energetic outdoor activity by a quiet story. There is a rhythmic alternation between the 'child's time' (creative play, outside time) and the teacher's time (ring-time, story), the teacher's time being comparatively short at this age. Working with rhythm helps children to live with change, to find their place in the world, and to begin to understand the past, present and a well-told story creates an appreciation for the human voice and the beauty and rhythms of language. It also helps to extend vocabulary and to aid the development of a good memory. Children leave Kindergarten with a rich and varied repertoire of songs, stories and poems; this might also include verses in French or German. Much of this learning will have taken place in the integrated way described - although story-time is always a very special event.

Children engage in many activities, such as sewing, which develop hand to eye co-ordination, manual dexterity and orientation (useful preparation for reading print from left to right). Children also discuss their own drawings and take great delight in telling stories by 'reading' their pictures. This activity promotes the development of verbal skills and frees the narrative from the printed text, thus encouraging children to use their own words. Many children also act out or perform puppet shows and develop dramatic skills through working with narrative and dialogue. Painting and drawing help with balance and symmetry and most five year-olds are able to write their own name. Children experience the musicality of language and its social aspects through playing ring games and eurhythm (a form of movement which works with language and music).
We feel that the combination of these activities cultivates a love of language, promotes fluency and allows children time to become really familiar with the spoken word - the best preparation and foundation for the subsequent development of literacy. Use of language also affects cognitive development as well-chosen words and good syntax support clear thinking.

- **ENCOURAGING LEARNING THROUGH CREATIVE PLAY AND SUPPORTING PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Children are able to exercise and consolidate their ability to understand and to think through their play. Creative play supports physical, emotional and social development and allows children to learn through investigation, exploration and discovery. It also gives scope for the use of imagination - an essential aspect of human intelligence. Play encourages the child to become inventive and adaptable, and to work with initiative and flair. In addition it develops and strengthens concentration.

Studies show that children who score highest in socio-dramatic play also demonstrate the greatest gains in a number of cognitive areas such as higher intellectual competence, longer attention span, and more innovation and imaginativeness. Good players also show more empathy toward others, less aggression, and in general more social and emotional adjustment. We would expect time and space to be given to creative play and a selection of suitable objects, for instance cloths, shells, logs, domestic toys and dolls to be provided in order to support a variety of play situations.

- **ENCOURAGING LEARNING THROUGH CREATIVE PLAY AND SUPPORTING PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

As mentioned in the section on rhythm and repetition, children develop a good relationship to the natural world. They learn to value its gifts and to understand its processes and patterns of change. Domestic tasks provide opportunities for elementary experiences in science and good use is made of the four elements. Children make toys from sheep’s wool, wood, felt, cotton and other natural materials. Many items are made as gifts for family members. Family participation is encouraged and teachers, working with parents, create ‘birthday stories’ which are based on the child’s personal biography and are told at special ceremonies to which families are invited.

People in the community who practise a particular craft, or who have special skills, are often invited to visit the Kindergarten and many teachers take their children for short local walks.


- **PROVIDING A SAFE CHILD-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT**

The Kindergarten should be a warm and welcoming place, an artistically shaped free space which serves as the setting for what the day’s impulse brings. This ‘impulse’ is a mixture of child motivated play experiences and teacher structured activities. There are few ‘finished’ toys which demand to be
used in a predetermined way. Furniture is small-scale and child-friendly and, as mentioned, the day is structured so as to provide the child with periods of activity and periods of rest. Groups are usually of a mixed age range and older children, who are familiar with the rhythm of the particular Kindergarten, are able to help the younger members of the group to feel secure.

WORKING WITH PARENTS

We are committed to establishing good relationships with parents and to the process of developing parenting skills. We recognise the importance of a happy, smooth transition from home to school and we work closely with parents to achieve this end. The majority of Kindergartens hold parent and toddler sessions and have a good rapport with the family before the child enters Kindergarten. Teachers promote and emphasise the importance of close partnerships with parents and provide a focus for parent support. We also create links with parents through a range of social and school-based events and activities. Close liaison between parent and teacher is encouraged.

2.1.5 Introduction to Formal Learning

Many years of experience confirm that literacy and numeracy, as formal skills, are best taught when the child has reached a point of maturation which corresponds to the emergence of the second teeth. Indeed—this timing is the norm in most European countries and in Asian countries such as Taiwan or Singapore whose education systems have received praise for their academic results in recent years.

The principled approach of Steiner Waldorf practitioners to not forcing early literacy and numeracy is not a result of an unwillingness to work towards the Desirable Learning Outcomes—but far from it. Class 1 pupils (at 6+) learn to read and to work formally with number with such enthusiasm and alacrity because:

a. they have reached a point of developmental readiness;
b. the diversity of lively hands-on experience, which they have encountered in their Kindergartens, supports and enriches this learning process;
c. they are motivated learners, unburdened by early failure.

It is felt that the Steiner Waldorf early years approach satisfies and indeed exceeds most of the Desirable Learning Outcomes. However, the implementation of the educational programme with its developmental approach to the teaching of literacy and numeracy means that the outcomes are achieved over a slightly longer time span. The SW approach aims to promote Desirable Learning Outcomes within its own pedagogical aims.

Experience has shown that children starting formal learning at 6+ in Steiner Waldorf schools have caught up with children following the National Curriculum by Key Stage 2.

# See SCM publication, Looking at Children’s Learning 1997.
PLAY WALES

Play Wales is funded by the National Assembly for Wales. The role of Play Wales is to influence policy, strategic planning and practice of all agencies and organisations that have an interest in, and a responsibility for children’s play. This is achieved by providing information, technical advice and guidance: helping to identify needs and contributing to the increasing recognition of the profound importance of play as a critical component of children’s development. Play Wales provides a forum for Playwork within the principality, and undertakes a national representational role for Playwork.

Particularly – whilst schools are staffed by committed educationalists, most have a limited understanding of the role that play has in children’s learning. As younger children are considered for entry, this becomes even more pertinent. There is clear evidence that young children benefit from opportunities to play freely. Further it is recognised that if they are deprived of these opportunities, children, particularly boys are disadvantaged. Children learn most effectively through freely chosen play. They learn key skills that contribute to their effectiveness in future adult life, for example, negotiation skills, risk management, problem solving, working independently and with others, etc.

I would also express some concern regarding to the appropriateness of the training that early year’s teachers have received with respect to children’s play. The skills, knowledge and attitude required by playworkers are a unique mix, and it is recognised that those elements that make an effective schoolteacher do not necessarily lend themselves to playwork.

Also, I believe that the impact upon communities of the proposal should be taken into account. Children’s play is often the “glue” that brings parents together, within a community. Parent and toddler groups and playgroups naturally engage parents, involving them in their children’s play within their communities. There is not necessarily the same pattern of parental involvement within schools particularly in rural communities with large catchment areas.

Rather than continue at some length I would be grateful if you could record Play Wales’s endorsement of the Children in Wales response to this consultation.

In conclusion, given Play Wales’s clear interest in the learning of children I would be grateful if you would ensure that in future we are included in relevant consultation exercises that have an impact upon children’s play needs and provision.
1. That visual impairment is a 'low incidence special need' amongst children in some parts of Wales; and that more than 50% of visually impaired children have additional disabilities (MDVI) many of whom will have learning difficulties. The consequences of these two facts are that visually impaired children’s needs are often inappropriately met as they will often be the only one within a nursery with acute visual loss; and that, where children have multiple disabilities, their needs will often both be profound and inadequately understood or addressed.

2. In consequence of the above, it is important to provide professionally-qualified, dedicated support staff for blind and partially sighted children in nursery and all other pre-school provision. This is especially important in consequence of the profound impact which poor vision has upon learning and development and the critical effect which inadequate or inappropriate early-years support has upon later progress and development.

3. It is equally important that there is equality of support and provision available to blind and partially sighted children in the early years arena: irrespective of whether they attend a private or state-provided establishment. All providers must be open to rigorous and comprehensive inspection to ensure that all visually impaired and other Special Needs children are supported in ways which both appropriately meet their needs and which crucially stimulate their development and enable them to maximise their potential.

4. RNIB Cymru would welcome any opportunity to further amplify any of these points or share our own research and expertise in this field with the National Assembly’s pre-16 Subject committee in either a written or an aural format.
WALES PRE-SCHOOL PLAYGROUPS ASSOCIATION

The educational and development value of early years education for 3 yr olds

In 1998/99 Wales PPA member groups catered for almost 30,000 children through playgroups, full day care groups and parent and toddler groups. Over 25,000 of these children were 3 years of age and under.

Expanding educational provision for 3 year olds may give parents the opportunity to choose an appropriate setting in which their child may participate, free of charge, in activities where they can learn through play. In a playgroup, children can be offered a planned range of activities where the children, through play, enhance their social, physical, linguistic, creative and emotional development in a safe and stimulating environment.

The emphasis for young children, and these are very young children, should be on learning through play rather than education in its narrowest terms or preparing children for school. The first early learning opportunities for children should be enjoyable and informal such as those provided in a playgroup setting. 3 year olds need

- to develop and learn at their own pace,
- at their stage of development rather than age,
- need to enjoy and learn from social integration,
- mix with their peers
- experiment with the world around them
- have fun learning through play.

If schools are seen as the only places where educational provision can be expanded this will be a retrograde step for the children in Wales. The staff ratios in schools are too high, classrooms are often overcrowded and the setting often inappropriate. Playgroups are designed especially around the needs of young children and provide a holistic approach to the child’s development and learning through play.

In rural areas where numbers of children are low there may be insufficient children to merit a nursery unit and this will increase the number of young children in mixed age classes in schools.

Wales PPA encourages The Pre 16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee to:

- question whether a school is the right place for these very young children
- look at building on the invaluable work of playgroups
- provide resources to enable playgroups to support the work of the National Childcare Strategy
- take steps to reduce the need for schools to increase their school numbers so that playgroups and schools can work together to provide quality care and education for the children of Wales.
The cost of expansion and the impact on childcare providers.

The cost of expansion should not only be viewed in financial terms. The introduction of 4 year olds into schools has had a disastrous effect on the playgroup movement. This may be seen as an unfortunate and unforeseen side effect of the National Childcare Strategy but one which it is hoped the Assembly will be very aware when planning the expansion of educational provision for 3 year olds.

Playgroups need a certain number of children to remain viable. Over the past 2 years groups have become increasingly disheartened and some have closed because of the continuing uncertainty. The picture across Wales is different from county to county.

If the expansion means that all 3 year olds go into schools then this will destroy the playgroups. The 4 year olds being taken into schools has had a tremendous effect but if the 3 year olds are to follow then very few playgroups will survive.

The value of a playgroup is that it encourages the whole family to be involved and through that involvement, parents can gain confidence, and become involved in training, sometimes for the first time ever.

The added value of the playgroup movement is the role a playgroup can play in developing parents, mainly women, giving them confidence in their own abilities and encouraging them to make the most of their own resources. When the playgroup movement evolved this added value, for the adults, was never imagined.

Playgroups serve their local community and are not about pursuit of profit, but need to make ends meet. As they are community based, groups keep their charges as low as possible. Playgroups charge minimal fees to parents/carers to cover the cost of wages, rent and heating and lighting. (Average fee £2.69 per 2 1/2 hour session: Source Wales PPA 1998 Survey. Averages for individual counties will vary)

Most playgroups hold fund-raising events in order to cover all other costs including equipment, resources, and refreshments. Fund-raising is a continual strain on groups and is the part of running a community group which many groups suggest they dislike most. Wages paid to the staff are minimal and there are no recognised pay scales. The minimum wage requirements and holiday pay have also hit playgroups hard!

Playgroups, on the whole, do not get any Government funding other than some who have gained grants through their Childcare Partnership. Groups who belong to Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin are able to obtain small grants from their National Association through money derived from the Welsh Language Board. Groups belonging to Wales PPA have no such advantage! The £25,000 awarded to Wales PPA, from the Government in 98/99 helped 47 groups (£520 each) but there were over 270 applications. The £25,000 awarded this year will probably help another 40 plus group. £60,000 granted by the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund has helped over 215 groups. BUT the Welsh Assembly need to recognise resources is required if playgroups are to survive to play their role in the National Childcare Strategy.

The greatest cost of expansion will be in the expansion of state provision including capital and revenue costs. In rural areas, where there is little statutory provision, children will have to travel...
long distances to the nearest school, which will involve expensive school transport, and will have a serious effect on the children themselves. The most cost effective method of expansion should be to fund places at existing provision, such as playgroups, giving parents a choice.

There must be a level playing field for all. All 3 year old children should be funded not just those attending statutory provision. If statutory provision is free parents will opt for it regardless whether it is the best place for the child to be. In rural areas where child numbers are already low the playgroups will be wiped out completely if schools only take up the expansion.

Funding for 4 year olds, to playgroups, in some counties ranges between £4 - £6 but playgroup staff suggest £7 a session per child is a more realistic amount. Some counties give grants to a group rather than a cost per child and this helps sustain the group as a whole, helping all the children.

If the local playgroup closes:-

- The community is the poorer
- Parental involvement is lost
- Training opportunities are lost to playgroup staff and parents
- Social inclusion, which a playgroup provides, is lost
- The foundations for future organisations are lost e.g. brownies, scouts, PTA’s etc.
- The child with special needs who is integrated at an early age into a local playgroup will miss out, together with the support given to his parents.
- All pre-school children, whatever their age, miss out on social integration as the parent & toddler attached to the group also closes.
- Social exclusion is more likely to happen.

Playgroups have played an invaluable role over the last 30 plus years in society, with little Government aid. Children deserve the best start in life and Wales PPA feels they can get that best start in a playgroup. BUT, playgroups need financial resources to improve, attain quality standards such as the Quality Assured playgroup accreditation scheme, for running costs as a whole, for training to improve standards for the children by upgrading playgroup staff skills.

As a national organisation, Wales PPA, is hampered due to a lack of financial and personnel resources in order to provide training, advise groups and give information and support to improve standards for over 1100 members. Consideration should also be given to increasing the funding required by the national organisation in order to support the playgroups to improve standards and good practice.

Local authorities have a great aversion to funding any core costs of national organisations and much energy is also spent looking for grants to pay existing commitments when the energy could be used improving standards, training and support. If funding for groups is channelled via Local Authorities it will need to be ring fenced otherwise strap cashed Local Authorities may see greater need for the money.

Wales PPA urges The Pre 16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee to:

- consider investing money in the future of playgroups, for training, improving standards especially in recording and assessment, achieve quality accreditation and towards running costs
• consider investing in increased grant aid for Wales PPA to provide support to the above, from a national strategic point of view and enabling the Association to afford to link positively into the Childcare Partnerships thereby improving quality and efficiency

• consider allowing the young children of Wales to continue to learn through play by assisting parents with free places in their local quality playgroup.

These actions by the Assembly will provide a new deal for pre-school parents and their children in Wales. These actions will provide support and strength to the voluntary sector, while working towards the National Childcare Strategy, in such a way that no Government has had the foresight to do before.
Thank you for the opportunity to comment on early years provision for three year old children. These observations are made in context of one of the Welsh Language Board’s most important roles, that is to maintain a strategic overview of Welsh medium education in Wales.

The ‘Childcare in Wales’ Welsh Affairs Committee’s report states that

Early years education is crucial to the future of the Welsh language. The Welsh Language Board should take a keen interest in the provision of childcare and the Welsh Funding Councils should be given specific targets for advanced training in the Welsh language. The UK Government and the Assembly should recognise that additional resources will be required if childcare is to be available in the Welsh language for all who want it.

The early years provision is fundamental to the future of bilingualism in Wales. It is by means of this provision, mainly through Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin and Welsh medium and bilingual primary schools’ provision, that many parents are given the choice of raising their children bilingually. Of course, early years provision for three year olds cannot be considered as a single entity. The provision that is available in Cylochedd Ti a Fi, and subsequent full time schooling must also be considered. The process of growing and learning is one continuum, and artificial barriers must not be constructed along the way.

According to statistics published by the Board in a recent report, just over 6% of 3 year olds speak fluent Welsh in Wales. This figure represents children that have learnt the language at home. By 11 years of age this figure rises to 20% of children, an increase of 14%. In terms of producing Welsh speakers, the education system produces more Welsh speakers than the home. Evidently, the early years provision plays a fundamental role in this process as there is no doubt that the earlier the child comes into contact with Welsh the better.

In the Welsh medium and bilingual early years sector in Wales, two processes are at work, these are language maintenance education programmes and immersion education programmes. With language support education, children learn through the medium of the language of the home. With immersion education, their educational experiences are mainly through the medium of the second language. Immersion education, which is the experience that children from non Welsh speaking homes receive in Cylochedd Ti a Fi and nursery groups and then in nursery and reception classes and in Key Stage 1 in schools, is familiar to us in Wales. It is fair to say that we have been pioneers with Canada in this area of provision on a worldwide basis for a number of years, and that the provision for early years is very successful and we should be proud of it and eager to maintain this development.

With the rapid growth of Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin since the early seventies, we have seen a significant development in pre school Welsh medium provision. There is no doubt that this growth in the number of children with bilingual skills as seen in the previous two censuses, would not have been realised without the pioneering work of the Mudiad.

Therefore when considering the development of an educational strategy for 3 year olds in Wales, the opportunity that children in Wales have to develop bilingualism from an early age must also be
considered. It will also be important to consider ways of extending the possibility of bilingualism as a practical choice for all parents. Any changes to the provision of early years in the future must strengthen and not undermine bilingual provision.

Early entry to schools and to the formal education system have for a long time been regular features of education in Wales, with some children starting school at 3, and others at 4. It would be beneficial to consider the suitability of this when considering the strategy as a whole. Without doubt, Welsh medium and bilingual primary schools have made a substantial contribution in terms of teaching children to speak Welsh. But, we need to consider if a school is an appropriate environment for a three year old. In terms of children that receive Welsh medium education, this could involve a journey of some distance to the nearest Welsh medium primary school, and some parents could reject this option on that basis. Would it not be better for the children to get the opportunity to learn Welsh in their own communities, in close proximity to their parents in the first instance. In this case it might be beneficial to deal with the Welsh / bilingual sectors differently.

There is a general consensus in Wales that there appears to be a close connection between general educational success and providing structured and unstructured play opportunities that have been purposefully planned for young children. Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin’s work has been based on these principles for a considerable time, combining links with the language and activities which provide children with the opportunity to develop physically, mentally, emotionally and socially along with purposefully planned play. These activities are noted as examples of good practice in ACCAC’s document, ‘Desirable Outcomes for Child Teaching’, despite the fact that this document does not deal with the bilingual situation in its entirety.

A marked improvement in the quality of the early years provision has been noted recently, and in recent discussion between the Board and the Mudiad, emphasis has been placed on improving standards and staff training. The Board believes that children who receive bilingual education, should not only have the opportunity to become bilingual in both languages, if not three or four languages, but also that they should receive the best possible education as a part of that process.

Some competition has developed recently between the voluntary and compulsory education sectors for three and four year old children. The key to this development is the desire to raise income. As a result of this, a number of voluntary groups have been forced to close because of the decreasing number of available children. As a result provision has also been lost for children under the age of 5. As was noted in the report of the Welsh Affairs Committee, ‘the loss of Welsh medium playgroups, particularly in areas where the local school operates in English, has very serious implications for the future of the Welsh language’.

It should therefore be essential to ensure that in the future, as the provision develops on a national level, that the two sectors, the voluntary and compulsory collaborate effectively and that careful consideration is given to new developments along with their effects on the provision and the providers.

The Committee should therefore carefully consider its policy in terms of the provision for 3 year old children. The experiences of other countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Finland, that support bilingual education systems and have established appropriate frameworks for early years provision, should also be considered. It is of vital importance that the Committee considers the international perspective in order to profit from the experiences and successes of other countries. The provision in Wales could then be tailored to suit the unique social, educational and linguistic situation in Wales.
The Cost of Extending High Quality Provision for 3 Year Old Children

The Welsh Language Board finances provision in this area by means of a substantial grant to Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin. The Board believes that in keeping with its future strategy, priority should be given to the support of Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin’s work to ensure that more parents are given the opportunity to choose bilingualism for their children.

The Board is about to agree with Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin a four year strategy, which notes what the Mudiad must achieve over this period.
WELSH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

Introduction

The Welsh Local Government Association welcomes the consideration by the Committee of this important topic and the opportunity to contribute to the debate. There can be no doubt that high quality Early Years provision can form the foundation for a successful education and good preparation for life.

The Association has in the past called for the introduction of a statutory duty placed on all Education Authorities by September 2000 to provide half time education for all 3 year olds whose parents want it. In practice most Welsh Authorities now do so.

The Association has also backed a cross sectoral approach to provision for under-eights, which takes account of the needs of the child, and of parents, for education and child-care.

The Association would welcome the extension of full-time early years provision to all three year olds whose families wish to take advantage of it, provided that any extension is sufficiently well conceived and financed to ensure that the provision is of a consistently high quality. New resources will need to be identified, as there is no capacity to finance the growth from existing budgets.

Progress to date

Most Welsh local authorities have already made extensive progress in extending school places to three-year-olds. Indeed, it has been a major priority since Local Government Re-organisation. This has been financed from the current funding for education and has not been a result of additional funding. In many authorities, the start date is the September following the 3rd birthday, and it will be important for the Committee to establish whether any extension is on this basis, or whether it will apply to all three-year-olds.

The key reason for the existing extension has been parental demand. Parents see early access to school as offering their child a head-start, and take up has been consistently high across Wales.

There is not currently a clear national position on the overall provision for three year olds, as the work of the schools is part of a wider pattern of provision including that by the voluntary sector and private nurseries. The Association believes that the Assembly should conduct a detailed national audit that considers not just the amount of provision, but also its quality, level of staffing, quality of the physical provision and effectiveness. There is also a strong case for consulting the parents of three year old and younger children, whether by survey or other methods, to establish their views on the existing provision and their preferred pattern of provision.
The cost of an extension.

The Association recognises that the expansion of provision to provide full time places for all those whose parents want it will have resource implications which must be met if the extension is to go ahead. The principal cost will undoubtedly be that of providing staff. Thought needs to be given to the ratios required. If these are to be higher than those in education for older children, and there are strong arguments for this to be the case, then these will need to be taken into account. The involvement of volunteers may have some impact on the numbers of paid staff required, but to presume on an expansion beyond existing levels of volunteering, may not be realistic. There must also be a concern that volunteers groups and private sector providers are least prevalent in areas of greatest need.

The increased numbers of staff required will also have implications for training. The Association is convinced that the high levels of parental demand for school places, is at least in part attributable to the greater confidence which parents have because of the presence of qualified staff. The Association wishes to see any new framework acknowledge the need for qualified staff throughout the sector.

The extension to full time provision may well incur costs, which the current part time pattern does not have. There are also likely to be statutory implications of such a move that impact on such issues as transport, school meals and other costs.

The association is currently working with member authorities to establish the cost of providing full time provision for all three year olds whose parents want it. There a number of key issues which must be addressed – for instance, provision in schools is currently free, but provision by the voluntary sector and private sector has charges. If the extension is to be free of charge, and to retain the current mixed economy, then there will be a cost attached. The start date will also have an impact.

In order to provide some indication of cost, an initial estimate has been prepared based on the costs of existing early years provision in schools.

The underlying assumptions in preparing this estimate are:-

- a start date of the September following the child’s third birthday;
- one admission per year;
- full time school hours and
- a staffing ratio of 1:13.

On this basis, the initial estimate of the total cost of provision for all three year olds is £50 million. Clearly, if the provision is extended to commence on the child’s third birthday, or alternatively, at the beginning of the term following the child’s third birthday, then the cost will be proportionately greater.

The estimate does not include the additional costs of training, or of capital provision. Providing suitably equipped classrooms or alternative facilities will undoubtedly be expensive. Each location should have appropriate play space; experiential play areas, outdoor play areas and a good level of quality resources.
In order to produce a more accurate costing, it will be necessary to determine precisely which pattern of provision is required. The survey of parents will help to establish demand, and this will inform the number of places required. The audit of existing provision can identify what if any upgrading is required, what the available capacity for expansion is, and what is the net requirement for new buildings and equipment.

**Educational Value**

It is important at the outset to stress that three year olds are not a homogenous group. This is an age of rapid development and children taking up provision will vary greatly in their needs and abilities. Clearly, full time conventional school places are not appropriate provision for all children in this age group. At this age, learning through play and the acquisition of social skills are particularly important. A variety of types of provision will be required to reflect the varying needs of children and their families. Although the content of the provision will differ from the existing curriculum, there is no doubt that quality provision is being delivered in the school setting, as well as in the various facilities used by the voluntary and private sectors. Good quality early years provision will help to prepare children for the national curriculum, in accordance with the requirements of the "school readiness" agenda.

The current policy of most authorities, to provide part time places for children in the September following their third birthday. This offers one suitable basis for the provision of early years education.

The existing provision for three year olds features a mixed economy, with the LEA as majority providers and important contributions made both by the voluntary and private sectors. The Committee has already heard evidence from PPA and MYM about their work. The Association recognises the very valuable contribution they make. However, there is concern that in many areas of high deprivation where the need for provision is arguably greatest, the coverage by the voluntary sector is sparse or non-existent. In these areas, it is the schools which are most likely to offer a service. In circumstances where the need to tackle social exclusion is one which both the Assembly and the Association have identified as a priority. Early years provision has a particular role to play in helping to ensure that children from deprived backgrounds do not start schools with a disadvantage. In order to ensure that provision reaches those who need it most, it is vital that we do not rely on the goodwill of volunteers, but have mechanisms in place which will guarantee places for children in deprived communities.

If we are to foster the mixed economy, and particularly, if the intention is to offer access free of charge to all three year olds, there will need to be funding mechanisms which ensure that all areas have satisfactory cover. The Association is anxious to avoid any repeat of the debacle of Nursery Vouchers. The existing Early Years Partnerships can form the basis for the local planning of comprehensive provision responding to the needs of children, and the needs and preferences of parents. Local Authorities should have the overall responsibility for developing comprehensive strategies in each County. It is suggested that new funding should come to Local Authorities, who in turn would fund a mixed economy of provision in their areas, which was responsive to local needs.

There is considerable scope for future joint working between schools and other providers, to build on the many existing examples of good practice. The provision of afternoon playgroups in school premises where three-year-olds attend school in the morning, is one example of successful partnership.
There is a problem with smaller schools in some areas, where provision is in classes of children of mixed ages. If this is not regarded as desirable, then additional or alternative facilities will be required.

It is vital that we ensure that any expansion produces high quality provision, and to this end, not only must we ensure those working in the field are properly trained, but there must be a robust, integrated quality monitoring and inspection regime which takes account of both the childcare and educational aspects of services.

The Assembly should consider establishing a Pre-Key Stage I element. This would be a Foundation Stage for 3, 4 and 5 year olds. The Foundation stage would prepare youngsters for the National Curriculum, but it will be important to ensure that the pressures of Key Stage 1 do not filter down to the Foundation Stage. Existing good practice both within the statutory and the voluntary sectors should be fed into the development of the Foundation stage.

There is also a need to ensure that there is continuing quality provision for those children with special needs. There is much good practice already evident in Wales in this field, and this will need to be expanded and integrated into the new patterns of provision.

**Child care**

The Association is acutely aware of the importance of this provision for the present and future economic prosperity of Wales. Any new developments should help to equip children to become independent learners and to develop a positive learning disposition while taking account of their developmental requirements and their need for play. The provision must also address the needs of working parents for reliable, good quality affordable childcare.

The framework which evolves must be based on an assessment of need for childcare based on current demand and future trends. The interaction between existing school and playgroup provision, and private childcare providers will need to be carefully considered. There may be scope for increased provision of childcare in schools, but careful thought will need to be given to the provision of appropriate facilities and levels of staffing to ensure that the quality of experience for the child is appropriate. If there are places available for the whole of the working day, then appropriate rest facilities etc. will be needed.

Thought needs to be given to the impact this may have on existing providers. On the positive side, it is undoubtedly the case that parents have to transport children considerable distances to childcare in some areas, especially more rural areas, and more local provision would undoubtedly be welcome. Parents should have the choice as to whether they wish to make use of local facilities, or those near to their workplace. The current pattern of child care often restricts this choice.

**Partnership**

Reference has already been made to the need to foster partnerships with the private and voluntary sectors. At a local level, the Early Years partnerships can provide this cross-cutting role. They can ensure that there is appropriate consideration of both education and care issues, and link the development of early years strategies to other appropriate strategies including the Child Care Strategy, Sure Start etc.
Given the many policy initiatives now being considered for under-eights, and given the cross-cutting nature of policy in this field which has implications not just for Education, but also for Social Affairs, Economic Development and Equal Opportunities, the Association believes that the Assembly should consider introducing a formal mechanism for developing a cross cutting policy framework in this field. The Welsh Local Government Association is itself planning to establish a working group to consider services to under-8s.

Conclusion

The proposal to extend provision is an exciting one, and with careful attention to the principles and details of implementation can offer a major step forward for children and their families in Wales. The success of the proposal will depend on the provision of adequate levels of resources.
PROFESSOR SONIA JACKSON

Early child development has been the subject of intensive research over the past fifty years. This research falls into three broad groups:

- The nature of early childhood and influences on development
- The relationship between early learning and later achievement
- The structure of schooling and the space accorded to children in society

As a result of the volume of research in this a clear consensus has emerged about the best conditions for healthy child development and success in learning. In many countries this knowledge is reflected in the structure and content of early years care and education. This has not been so in the UK where there has been no coherent policy on pre-school education. The opportunity to put this right seems to have been passed by in England with a flurry of uncoordinated initiatives with different agendas. There is a chance in Wales to plan a comprehensive long-term strategy based on knowledge about the needs of children and families.

School Starting Age

The UK is one of a small minority of countries where the compulsory school starting age is 5. Most others begin formal schooling at 6 or 7. However this is complemented by age appropriate nursery education available to all from 3 to 6, often with extended day care provision to meet the needs of working parents.

International comparisons of test scores on reading, writing and mathematics show that children who start formal learning no earlier than 6 do better on tests at 8 years than those who start primary school at 5. Learning starts at birth so that a comprehensive early education strategy needs to cover the years from 0 to 6.

Different rates of development

Early years educators in countries as different as Hungary, Norway, Belgium and many others are clear in their view that learning to read and write proceeds much more quickly and easily when children's physical development, in particular fine motor skills, has reached the necessary stage. Forcing children to undertake tasks that are developmentally inappropriate risks exposing them to the experience of failure and undermines their confidence. Some children may be able to write at 3 but the majority will struggle and a number will become discouraged (one estimate is up to 40%)

Boys and girls

In general boys development is slower than that of girls, particularly in the areas of language and manual dexterity which are the foundation of formal school subjects. Although boys get more attention in class than girls it is often of a negative kind. Observations in nursery and reception classes show that boys are frequently told off for lack of concentration, not sitting still when told, being noisy etc. They suffer even more from inappropriate conditions (crowded classroom, poor
adult-child ratio, lack of opportunity for physical activity) than girls do. This can lead to behavioural problems and in extreme cases to exclusion. There is a clear link between early school failure, behavioural and emotional difficulties and problems in adolescence including offending.

In many other countries there is far more emphasis on preparing children for formal learning by a carefully structured curriculum based on play and discovery. For example in Norway children spend a whole year learning the shapes of letters and mathematical concepts entirely through play before any attempt is made to teach them to read. They then learn to read and write fluently within a few months, usually by the age of 7. There is recognition that very young children learn best through activity. In Denmark, with a similar climate to ours, children in nursery school (3–6) spend more than 50% of their school time out of doors.

The future structure of early years provision

Bringing three year olds into school might seem a simple way of expanding provision, but there is clear evidence that it could be counter-productive. Existing reception classes are not geared to this developmental stage. They are probably not even appropriate for 4 and 5 year olds, especially with the pressure to reach ‘desirable outcomes’, which most teachers even in this country consider put harmful stress on these very young children and do not lay good foundations for future learning.

Rather than destroy the existing network of playgroups and family centres, which would be the effect of simply extending formal schooling a further year, it would seem better to take longer to consider a more comprehensive strategy for early years services, based on what we know about young children and on best practice from other countries. In particular we should dismiss the mistaken idea that earlier is necessarily better. Learning based on enjoyment and motivation is much more likely to succeed than if it is externally imposed.

Sonia Jackson
Chair, Children in Wales
Research Professor, University of Wales Swansea
Professorial Fellow, University of London Institute of Education
**RUTH COWARD**

*(Submission from Ruth Coward, Headteacher Grangetown Nursery School)*

**Background**

The organisation of which I am headteacher, is an LEA funded Nursery School. 80 children attend on a part time basis - 40 in the morning and a different 40 in the afternoon. Each child comes for five morning or afternoon sessions each week. We are committed to providing education and care to the highest possible standard we can attain because we believe that it is their right. This was approved by the in depth inspection (on a par with primary schools) carried out by HMI in 1997.

If any members of the committee would like to come and assess for themselves how 3 and 4 year olds are learning at this Nursery School which is local to the Assembly, we would be very pleased to show you round and discuss any points with you.

**a) the educational and developmental value of early years education for three year olds**

Together with the recent stress on family values also runs the policy of making it possible for mothers to return to work, especially single mothers, to help with family finances. Previously it was regarded as desirable for women to remain at home to provide a stable environment for their children. However, not only are families now being encouraged to find care for their children so that mothers can return to work for economic reasons; it is also being felt that it is not only beneficial but desirable for children to attend a playgroup or nursery. The Audit Commission on the provision for under five's in England and Wales said in 1996: “Children’s early educational experience is crucial for developing the socialisation and learning skills that they will need throughout their lives. (page 4)

Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart (1993) in the High/Scope programme proved the long term benefits to three and four year olds of a nursery programme. The first study to evaluate pre-school effectiveness in Britain is currently underway in Cardiff and London (Effective Provision for Early years Education (EPPE) project ) and it will report its initial findings in 2001.

Whilst we eagerly await these findings my staff and I would bear out the already established research that it is vital for children of three and four to experience the stimulation and challenge of educational tasks appropriate to their age and under the supervision of properly trained staff who constantly have their expertise updated through training. The education of four year olds has been prioritised and now most of them in Cardiff have access to publicly funded (LEA) Nursery places if their parents wish. This is not true for three year olds.

By the time they are three many children have already been to playgroup or attended day care, although in the area served by this Nursery School there are still a considerable number of children who have not. Most of these children are ready by the age of three for a more learning orientated environment.

It is of great importance that children should be learning social skills. In this world where many would feel that moral values are being eroded and anti social behaviour is at an unacceptably high level, it is vital that our youngest children are learning to socialise in a consistent and stable environment, planned and organised by staff who have very clear aims and focused understanding of how to set these values.
During this stage in a child’s life her/his brain is developing faster than at any other time in her/his life. So that by the time that a child is three this socialising aspect should go hand in hand with education. [Over the last few days I have watched some of my new children master the use of the roller ball (a large mouse) on the computer so competently that it has brought home to me how quickly they are capable of learning and mastering a skill at this age] If we are to later realise the full potential of the children in our country we should be placing them in establishments where the staff can lay the foundations for them to achieve maximum learning.

This should include experiences in:

- listening
- communicating
- spatial awareness
- early mathematics
- early mark making and writing
- early technology
- early problem solving
- early understanding of time and place
- creating both in paint and modelling and also in music and dance

However it is absolutely crucial that this educational development should be in the hands of as highly trained staff as is possible. It is vital that these very young children have early experiences that are matched to their potential. This has been understood by so many of our competitors in Europe who put their children into Kindergartens or nurseries which follow a very specialised curriculum but who do not introduce formal education often until a child is six. Our three year olds are ready for educational experiences and activities - but only those appropriate to them, delivered by a highly trained staff. Strong evidence is now emerging that if they are exposed to formal education too early more damage than benefit will occur, boys particularly will fail later and children will become school refusers.

At present many three year olds are in playgroups and day nurseries. Research has shown (Blatchford) that frequently those sectors have stressed the caring element or introduced inappropriate formal activities (sometimes by teachers who have no early years training or experience).

If responsibility for the education of three year olds lay with the LEA it would then be incumbent upon the Authority to ensure that the children in its nurseries, whether LEA or private, were all providing facilities of high quality with trained staff.

In our more humane times increasing numbers of children with special needs are coming into playgroups and nurseries. It is being realised that for many of them early intervention is vital if they are to successfully take their places in the education system later. If they were able to take up places when they were three an earlier diagnosis by educational psychologists would access the help they need and so often miss at the moment.

This Nursery School is situated in a richly multicultural area. If the three year old children from our ethnic families were able to come into school not only would they be learning the language of education sooner but all the children would be mixing and playing together thus helping to prevent early imbibed prejudices and making for greater racial harmony.
b) the cost of expansion and the impact on child care providers:

As an employee of the LEA I am not in a position to give any accurate costings regarding expansion but am sure that the City and County of Cardiff LEA will be able to do so much more accurately.

I fully understand that if all three year olds were placed in LEA nursery classes or schools some playgroups (which have always stressed the social element with a higher ratio of less, and often untrained, staff) would be in a more vulnerable position. However, after the initial shake-down, they would be able to play a role more appropriate to their expertise with mothers and toddlers and the children under three making their first independent moves away from home.

For the Nursery School here the impact of the proposed policy would be to offer high quality places to many more children within the catchment area. It would, however put pressure on places; we would need more space for more children. We do not have enough space in the present building to accommodate all the three and four year olds in our area. Because of the LEA’s recent regrettable policy for a single entry into primary schools (a policy which shows no concern for the welfare of the children) I can now admit all the four year olds (those in the academic year immediately below the reception class) but only about one eighth of the three year olds. I would probably need 20 extra full time places (40 part time places) to accommodate the three year olds. This would mean another one to two members of staff. Should more children with significant special needs enter the system then more appropriately trained staff would be needed.

Wales has always had a strong commitment to education. The LEA provided the means for myself and my staff to deliver nursery education of the highest quality to the children in this segment of the Capital. The children here deserve it and to build on what already exists would be the best way of realising the investment not only in buildings and equipment but also in people already in place here.
The Educational Developmental Value of Education for Three year olds

For the last thirty years (co-incidentally the length of my professional and personal involvement with early years education) there have been increasing amounts of research both here and in the USA, Europe and Australasia, which clearly indicate the extensive benefits that are likely to accrue from committing resources to effective programmes of early childhood education. Programmes which also involve parents have been shown to be particularly effective in breaking down cycles of deprivation and social exclusion. Perhaps the most widely reported is a continuing longitudinal follow up by David Weikart of children from one of Headstart’s original programmes in the 1960’s (see Appendix 1 for a summary of the significant benefits and a cost analysis of this American pre-school project which was aimed at impoverished black families). And yet, successive governments have been reluctant to promote the expansion of early years education on the grounds that it is very expensive (though not, I would contend, as expensive as the alternative – millions of pound spent in remediation and various forms of state support) and that there is insufficient ‘proof’ of its effectiveness. This latter flies in the face of what research informs us about the crucial importance of children’s early educative experience to later life chances and what common sense tells us (even politicians must have some insight into the powerful formative influences of their own early childhoods).

There is an incredible diversity of early years provision available in England and Wales which has been allowed to grow and flourish since the end of the Second World War (currently 3 year old children can attend a nursery school, nursery class, combined nursery centre, day nursery, family centre, workplace nursery, playgroup, private school, childminder’s premises or in many cases a combination of two or more of these). This diversity is often paraded as a virtue (allowing greater parental choice, meeting local needs etc), but has in reality grown up out of necessity, with charities and voluntary organisations filling the breach left by insufficient local and national government funding. Despite recent best efforts, early years provision remains patchy in quantity and quality and needs a radical overhaul in terms of support, co-ordination, planned structure and staff training, if our youngest and most vulnerable citizens are to receive consistent and effective early education.

Recent initiatives, such as the ill fated nursery voucher scheme, have done little to improve the quality or availability of early education. The legacy in some areas of the country has been to increase the already large numbers of four year old children placed in reception classes, effectively lowering the age of school entry by a year (in most other countries in the developed world formal schooling does not begin until children are six or seven years old). An unplanned side effect of the voucher scheme was the closure of many private nurseries and playgroups, as local schools ‘hoovered’ up all the available vouchers and children by offering an early start to school.

Since the mid 1970’s, Wales has build up an excellent record in terms of local government funded early years provision for three and four year olds. Providing that the voucher system and subsequent funding arrangements have not done irreparable damage, there should still be a good foundation of early years practice on which to build and develop for the future. Ways need to be sought to ensure that workers in voluntary and private settings are adequately trained and that these settings are providing high quality educational experiences for three year olds comparable with those offered in LEA run nursery classes.
What constitutes high quality education for three year olds?

Education for 3 year olds is only valuable so long as it is developmentally appropriate — that is, based on what is known about how young children develop and learn, but also what early years’ practitioners learn about the individual needs and interests of each child in a group or class. To be effective, therefore, early years’ practitioners must have a good background knowledge of child development and children’s learning together with excellent observational skills, sensitivity in interpersonal relationships and specific knowledge of individual children. These two aspects — general knowledge about child development and learning and particular knowledge about the needs of individuals — have to work reciprocally to ensure provision of an appropriate curriculum.

This has implications for the training of early years teachers, since the study of child development and children’s learning has been virtually expunged from teacher training courses because of the government’s emphasis on subject study and preoccupation with assessing students’ subject knowledge.

Why is knowledge of child development important?

Knowledge of child development is relevant to all the developmental domains — physical, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social — and provides a baseline from which practitioners can plan suitable activities and experiences. Being able to predict, within broad parameters, what children are able to do (and are likely to be interested in doing) at particular ages and stages decreases the likelihood of a curriculum missing the mark altogether, by underestimating or overestimating the capabilities and interests of children of this age group. Having a good grounding in child development:

- helps to create appropriate expectations for children’s behaviour;
- helps with understanding how and why children behave in certain ways;
- provides stage related information about children’s abilities and understanding;
- provides chronological data about developmental milestones;
- supports the concept of individual and cultural variation;

all of which underpin the planning and implementation of effective practice.

What can be expected of a typical three year old child?

Three year olds are beginning to make rapid improvements in hand eye co-ordination (e.g. holding a pencil, feeding themselves) and have increasing control over large body movements such as running, jumping and riding a tricycle. They are becoming more socially confident and can join in with other children in games of make-believe play. Children of this age may understand concepts of sharing and turn taking but will need adult support to do so. Deferring gratification is difficult, but not impossible. Although three year olds have a large and growing vocabulary, their speech remains peppered with many unconventional grammatical forms and immature pronunciation. They can hold simple conversations but these are largely confined to the here and now.

Understanding of the past and the future is very limited. Repetitions of favourite stories, songs and nursery rhymes are demanded and appreciated. They are intellectually curious (about a much wider range of topics that they are usually given credit for) and many questions of the ‘what’, ‘who’, ‘where’ variety (asking ‘why’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ questions does usually not occur until children are 4 years old).
What about an understanding of children’s learning?

Learning is such a complex activity that no one theory completely explains it, but there are some perspectives about early learning which are currently held by early educators and derive mainly from the ideas and theories of Piaget and Vygotsky:

- children actively construct their knowledge and understanding of the world – a child’s mind is not a miniature version of an adult’s and neither is it an empty vessel that gradually fills up with information. From infancy children are mentally and physically active in their struggle to make sense of the world, both through their social experiences with adults and other children and their physical experiences with objects. It is through repeated experiences involving interaction with people and materials that children’s mental structures and concepts are continually being reshaped, expanded and reshaped, expanded and reorganised, as they come to see contradictions between their thinking and the reality of the world around them.

- children learn through social interaction with adults and other children – social interaction is vital for intellectual development, but also necessary for children to develop social competence and self-esteem. Similarly, language development is fundamental to learning and this can only occur through social interaction.

- children learn best when their physical needs are met and when they feel psychologically safe and secure – learning is a risky business and children only learn well in environments where they feel happy, comfortable and relaxed. The perceived continuity of experiences between the home environment and early years’ settings can be an influential factor in whether children feel psychologically secure and can be enhanced by the involvement of parents.

- children learn from experiences that are relevant, engaging and meaningful and allow them to build upon what they already know – the human mind is a pattern detector, continually trying to make sense of new situations in the light of old ones, and this is how children attempt to understand and make meaning out of their experiences. The younger the children, the more important it is to provide experiences that they recognise (by making them more homelike, perhaps) so that they can connect new learning to what they already know and in this way begin to make sense of it. Children (and adults) are more effective learners in situations where new knowledge and skills are presented in understandable social contexts rather than in isolation (e.g. learning about numbers and counting through making jam tarts rather than tracing over numbers in a work book).

- children’s learning is based, initially at least, in direct experience of the world through encounters with people and objects – it is part of the early years practitioner’s role to move children very gradually from a natural and heavy reliance on learning through direct experience towards more abstract ways of conceptualising which are essential in later school learning. It should be strongly emphasised that there is little point in introducing young children to formal school activities at earlier and earlier ages (in the mistaken belief that this will ultimately raise standards) when these are learned more easily and quickly by six and seven year olds who have had the benefit of an appropriate early education.

- play is an important and valuable vehicle for young children’s learning, but children can and do learn in other ways and often enjoy doing so – children’s play is important because, as well as
being all absorbing and self-initiated, it provides many opportunities for exploration, experimentation and manipulation that are essential for constructing knowledge and representational thought. Make-believe and imaginative play allows children to express their feelings, to interact with others, to negotiate and to resolve conflicts through an increasingly sophisticated use of language. However, young children learn from (and greatly enjoy) being involved in real activities, such as helping an adult with shopping for ingredients for a shared cookery session later in the day, or feeding the rabbit or washing painting aprons. They also learn from other adult-led activities such as story and poetry reading or singing, and which are essential in providing a solid basis for later literacy learning.

What about curriculum content?

So far the emphasis has been on the processes of learning and it is easy to fall prey to the fallacy of placing too much importance on how children learn at the expense of what they learn (the opposite error is also possible). Both content and process need to be considered equally when planning for this age group – they are the opposite sides of the same coin. There are many ways of organising curriculum content, including traditional subjects and disciplines, but it is generally accepted that for very young children these subject boundaries are somewhat meaningless, since they lack many of the concepts which given them definition (what can history mean to a three year old who has yet to develop an understanding of last week?). What is needed is something more flexible, which allows for a more integrated and thematic approach. An appropriate curriculum framework should, without being trivial, capitalise on the interests and pre-occupations of this age group; be, in Bruner’s words, ‘intellectually honest’ and, finally, challenge and extend the developing knowledge, understanding and skills of three year olds.

Bibliography


Carnegie Task Force (1994) Starting Points – Meeting the needs of our youngest children New York: Carnegie Corporation


PROFESSOR MELHUISH

a. The educational and development value of early years education for 3 year olds

The research evidence currently available indicates that those children who have had pre-school education to benefit in later educational and developmental progress. For example, Barnett and Escobar (1990) in a review of 17 programmes found that early pre-school education programmes had significant long-term beneficial effects on assignment to special needs education, retention in grade, and school dropout.

There are other research reports in a similar vein, mainly from America. There is also some corroborating evidence from Europe eg, Nabuco (1996) in Portugal. Within the UK, there is currently underway 2 related research projects on pre-school education and later development. These projects are being undertaken in England and Northern Ireland by a research team consisting of:

Edward Melhuish, Cardiff University
Kathy Sylva, Oxford University
Pam Sammons, University of London Institute of Education and
Iram Siraj, Blatchford, University of London Institute of Education.

These projects are following 4000 children from age 3 to age 7. The children’s developmental progress across the pre-school period and within the first 2 years of primary school is being considered in terms of family background and the child’s pre-school experience. Over 200 pre-characteristics of the environment provided for children. The types of pre-school centres in the study include playgroups, private day nurseries, nursery classes, nursery schools, local authority social service centres, and combined centres. The studies will be analysing children’s progress both in terms of type of centre, and the characteristics of the centres, eg, staffing, group size, adult-child interactions. Together these studies represent the largest and most thorough consideration of the developmental effects of pre-school education undertaken in Europe.

Reports on the characteristics of children and centres in the England study when the children are 3 are forthcoming in October 1999 (Sylva, et al,a, 1999, Sammons et al, 1999, Siraj-Blatchford et al, 1999, Melhuish et al, 1999, Sylva, et al,b, 1999). The first results analysing for the effects of pre-school education, when the children start school will be forthcoming in the early months of 2000. Margaret Hodge at the DfEE has requested to be kept informed of findings as they are forthcoming, as they will be considered in formulating policy in England.

b. The cost of expansion and the impact on children providers

The cost of expansion will depend critically upon the types of provision which are expanded. The cost of provision varies markedly by type.

Expansion of any one type of provision will have a major impact on the other types. For example, expanding access to nursery classes and schools will have a major impact on playgroups and private day nurseries. Expansion should be planned with these inevitable consequences in mind hence some sectors or pre-school provision could disappear.
References


Thank you for asking us regarding a policy on Early Years Education Provision for 3 Year Olds. There is good evidence that early years education assists in the general social development and educational development of all children. This is particularly the case for children from deprived areas and suffering social deprivation. Our experience as clinicians working with children and their families has convinced us of the value of early years education. We believe it has had a major positive effect.

There is also good evidence that when educational provision at this age combines and collaborates with parents then there are improvements in child/parent relationships and child management generally. This is particularly the case when the provision specifically targets child/parent relationships.

Early years education provides an excellent context for the provision of appropriate health education packages for young families with children of this age.

We believe that the cost of expansion of early years education would be well justified by its positive effect. We find it difficult to comment on the impact on other child care providers.

J R SIBERT
Professor of Community Child Health

E C STREET
Consultant Child Psychologist
Honorary Senior Research Associate
Committee Minutes Relevant to the Report

PRE 16 02-99(min) - 30 June 1999

Agenda Item 8: Policy Development Draft Remits PRE 16 02-99(p.7)

8.1 The Chair invited the Committee to consider the proposed remits and timetables.

8.2 The Chair advised that the availability of background information dictated the order in which the policy development reviews would be tackled, he drew attention to the suggested timescales.

8.3 At the meeting on July 14 the Committee would consider in detail the first topic ‘Early Years Education Provision for 3 Year Olds’. The Chair asked Members to consider by the next meeting who they would wish to invite to give written evidence on the first review. The Clerk would then issue invitations to those bodies and individuals after the next meeting. Members may also find it helpful to read the House of Commons, Welsh Affairs Select Committee, Third Report on Childcare in Wales.

8.4 The paper was noted.

PRE 16 03-99(min) - 14 July 1999

Agenda Item 7: Policy Development – Early Years Provision for 3 Year Olds. PRE 16 03-99 (p.5)

7.1 The Chair invited the Committee to consider the paper and to identify those whom it wished to invite to provide written comments.

7.2 Issues raised in discussion;

- the inclusion of Professor Jo Sibert was endorsed;
- whether educational interests were adequately covered in the oral session planned for September 15th;
- the value of teaching children at this age informally by the use of hands and using listening skills rather than encouraging children to use pencils etc;
- that a balance was needed between providing education and care;
- the need to include other institutions, organisations and special nursery units showing good practice e.g. the Steiner Organisation (Dafydd Roberts).

7.3 Members agreed that those Organisations listed in Annex 3 of the paper should be invited to provide written submissions to the Committee and that Professor Jo Sibert and the Steiner Organisation should be added to the list.
Action Points

7.4 The Clerk will invite submissions from these organisations and individuals.

PRE 16 04-99(min) - 15 September 1999

Agenda Item 5: Policy Development – Early Years Education Provision for 3 Year Olds.

5.1 The Chair referred Members to the consultation responses circulated in one document, to which additional submissions would be added on receipt. The Clerk apologised for the lateness of distribution to Members. Some Welsh versions were outstanding this was due mainly to the number having to be translated. Further editing of both versions was ongoing.

5.2 The Chair introduced invited guests from ACCAC and Estyn, and Dr Gill Harper-Jones, Lecturer from University College, Swansea, who all had 10 minute slots in which to highlight points from their submissions.

5.3 Brian Connolly introduced Gary Brace and Kim Ebrahim; each spoke to a bullet point slide presentation under the headings ‘Principles of Provision’, ‘Features of the Curriculum’ and ‘National Qualifications for Early Years Education’, respectively.

5.4 Susan Lewis and Chris Abbott referred to the Estyn submission. Ms Lewis reminded the Committee of the value of education for the under 5’s; there is a tradition in Wales of early entry into primary schools for this age group; take-up was higher in maintained provision than in non-maintained; inspection of nursery provision had identified good quality at age 3 and confirmed that there was a need; there was evidence of a firm foundation being laid in numeracy and literacy; all of this suggested strong home school links. Mr Abbott spoke of the format of provision and how it should differ between under and over 5’s; provision for 3 and 4 year olds showed breadth and balance recognising choice between teacher approach and child interests; personal and intellectual development were essential factors to be nourished; the value of a good home contribution to quality play and practice with teachers was beneficial; inspections had revealed some weaknesses where Key Stage 1 and younger children were mixed; whereas some younger children were capable of doing more careful planning of provision was essential. Mr Abbott referred to a report titled ‘The Inspection of Education Provision for Children before Compulsory School Age : A Guide for Inspectors’, copies would be provided for the Committee.

5.5 Gill Harper-Jones referred to the bullet points set out at annex 3 and advised that provision in the maintained sector was very good in Wales and had always been so in south Wales. In her view the main criteria for high quality provision was that it should be developmentally appropriate as children construct their own image of the world around them, their experience should be built on using quality social interaction that recognised parental input.

5.6 Issues raised in discussion included:

- how many of the varied teaching qualifications available met the criteria for early years provision;
- whether there was a sufficient training programme and appropriate qualification for
Welsh medium teaching for early years and whether the Committee should look further at this;
- were there comparable demands on provision within schools and in nursery units elsewhere;
- how difficult it was for nursery and playgroups to plan for the future, how might that affect provision;
- that the care of children in early years should be taken into account, was there a role for social service departments; and
- that an early introduction to formal education for children from a disadvantaged background might detract from its value.

5.7 Members were advised that training provision was largely demand led, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin were pursuing an appropriate qualification; Inspectors look at the quality of provision, in particular the extent to which it enables development appropriate to the child; that there was no substitute for a good home environment and the ‘start’ that that gave to early learners; there had been some initiative in looking at the effects of deprivation but no sustained longitudinal study; the responsibility of social services – in relation to young children – was set out in the Children’s Act. There were ‘educare’ models to be found in England where some nurseries were jointly funded and administered by local education authorities and social service departments; there was some evidence that an early start was disadvantageous to some pupils.

5.8 The Chair thanked the guest speakers for adding to the views already submitted.

PRE 16 05-99(min) - 29 September 1999

Agenda Item 4: Early Years Education Provision for 3 Year Olds

4.1 The collated written submissions would be circulated to Members before the next meeting on 13 October. The majority of those organisations invited to provide written submissions would have done so by the middle of next week (6 October). 3 organisations would give oral presentations – Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association and Children in Wales. On 3 November the Welsh Local Government Association would address the Committee.

4.2 Issues raised in discussion included:
- concern at the number of contacts who had not responded;
- had some in fact ‘declined’; and
- had the Committee not thought to contact additional experts in this field perhaps from abroad, also other UK bodies.

4.3 The Chair reminded members that the Committee had been consulted about who should be asked to contribute and agreed the programme. The Clerk explained that some consultees had ‘declined’ to respond within the timescale, responses were still coming in. The final response schedule would identify who had not responded. A few Local Education Authorities and Early Years Partnerships had responded jointly. The Chair stressed there was little time to invite additional comments if the proposed timescale was to be met but if Members wished
to do so they should inform the Clerk as soon as possible. He pointed out that some
comments received included reference to research undertaken in the USA; he asked the Clerk
to canvass colleagues for reliable additional authorities that could be contacted for written
evidence very quickly, if Members knew of any they should tell the Clerk. The Assembly
Secretary said that she had met the Norwegian Childrens Ombudsman and would provide
the Clerk with a copy of a paper he had presented on child care. The Assembly Secretary
took the opportunity to inform Members of the Committee about the agreement that had
been reached for the provision of childcare to those invited to give presentations to the
Committee. When individuals and organisations were invited to give presentations to the
Committee they would be asked if they had any childcare requirements. If sufficient demand
for childcare was established then the possibility of providing it through hiring a ‘Playbus’
would be considered. The childcare provision through the ‘Playbus’ could only be done on pre
determined demand and could not be used for ‘drop in’ care.

4.4 The Chair asked for clarification as to how the childcare provision would be funded as the
Committee had not been asked to consider this in respect of its budget. The Assembly
Secretary confirmed that it would not be paid from the Committee’s budget.

PRE 16 06-99(min) - 13 October 1999

Agenda Item 3 : Policy Development – Early Years Education Provision for 3 Year Olds
PRE 16 06-99(p.2)

3.1 The Chair welcomed the three organisations who were to make presentations to the
Committee.

Hywel Jones, Chairman of Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin.

3.2 Mr Jones introduced Ms Rita Jones, Director for the south east of Wales. He explained that
MYM were a national and voluntary organisation sited at over 400 locations in Wales. MYM
believed in supporting the learning process from birth and did so through Cylchoedd Ti a Fi
and Cylchoedd Meithrin providing a continuous education of quality. MYM encouraged and
relied upon parent participation and their wishes for language preference, location and
length of provision. MYM provided purposeful play where children would learn by
experience and participation, an important base for future education. Mr Jones referred to
the report ‘Start Right’ prepared by Sir Christopher Ball which reinforced the view that
children thrive in a secure environment provided by parents, professionals and the
community.

3.3 He quoted the teacher/pupil ratio of 1:8 as typical of the voluntary sector compared with
1:13 in maintained provision where classes might reach 30 + children, suitability and safety of
location were also important factors. Mr Jones made reference to the requirements of the
Children’s Act which applied to voluntary but not to maintained provision.

3.4 If maintained provision at age 3 was to be required not one Cylch or MYM playgroup would
survive. Parents and the community would lose a valuable resource for the youngest children,
preparatory experience for Welsh medium education would be jeopardised and 2,000
voluntary posts would be lost. A separate factor in Welsh medium education was that schools
in south east Wales were not evidentially community schools. Mr Jones concluded his presentation by commending to the Committee the recommendations of ‘Start Right’.

3.5 The Chair invited discussion which included:

- whether the service provided by MYM to feeder primary schools justified greater resourcing, the overall costs to MYM were greater than in the maintained sector where provision would be free to parents this had not been helped by the issue of nursery vouchers;
- the view that children should only be taken into school in the September after their 3rd birthday; and
- whether MYM had fully explored a partnership approach with LEA’s.

3.6 Mr Jones confirmed that MYM’s feeding role was an important factor for Welsh medium education and was often the only link for parents. Additional resourcing had been highlighted, he said, in a Welsh Affairs Select Committee Report which urged the Welsh Language Board to take more interest in Welsh medium child care funding. He confirmed that the introduction of the voucher system had given rise to problems between voluntary bodies and local education authorities. Additional funding was essential for voluntary bodies to ensure local quality provision, this could ensure and improve quality of provision for children up to the September following their 3rd birthday. Currently some English medium schools take children at an early stage jeopardising fee-paying Welsh medium provision. MYM were working effectively and efficiently with local authorities where they were prepared to work in partnership. Ms Jones advised that MYM were opposed to moving from part time to full time, such a move would jeopardise provision and prejudice the viability of Cylchoedd Meithrin.

3.7 The Chair thanked MYM for their presentation; he stressed the need for a strategy to provide for a fertile and secure environment in which the very young could learn and be supported through their initial life experiences.

Wendy Hawkins, National Executive Officer, Wales Pre-school Playgroups Association (WPPA)

3.8 Mrs Hawkins gave a slide presentation copies of which are at annex 2. She referred to the Plowden and Wolfenden Reports and the Welsh Affairs Select Committee Report on Childcare in Wales, she emphasised the need for a partnership approach to early years provision starting with parents and playgroups leaders, also the role of playgroups and the way in which they served local communities. Playgroups and local authorities were beginning to work together but it would take time for this to develop into full partnerships. She referred to the award of £25,000 in 1998/99 to Wales PPA and its distribution of £520 to each of 47 groups. This year the award would help another 48 groups.

3.9 The Chair invited discussion which included:

- the need for a more practical approach to working in partnership;
- whether school entry from the September following a child’s third birthday would help secure playgroups?;
- whether quality control systems were in place?; and
- what provision there was for Welsh language provision?
3.10 Mrs Hawkins advised that a partnership approach with local education authorities was developing but that progress had been slow; there was parental support for playgroup provision, the funding that would go to schools to provide for age 3 and 4 children might be better spent on playgroups or be distributed equally to provide for parental choice. Local social services provided a quality assured accreditation scheme, but this was expensive in terms of time and costs.

Provision was bilingual in 60% of playgroups, this was expected to rise to 75% next year. The Chair thanked Mrs Hawkins for her presentation.

Catriona Williams, Chief Executive - Children in Wales

3.11 Ms Williams introduced her colleagues Pat Davies, Sian Wyn Siencyn, and Professor Sonia Jackson, Chair. Children in Wales welcomed the focus that the Committee had drawn to early years provision. The organisation took a broad based multi-disciplinary view of provision, they favoured an holistic approach based on the principle of the rights of the child. Ms Williams felt that legislation affecting children was inconsistent, legislation on education did not include child welfare. She raised two main issues – how social exclusion could be addressed with the attendant problems of low parental self esteem and the value in some communities of mother and toddlers groups as a community lifeline.

3.12 Pat Davies focussed on child needs, the lack of public sector investment in research, the harmful effects of formal education at an early age, the value of parental involvement in development, the potential problem of providing a differentiated curriculum covering a 3 to 7 age range. She stressed the need for learning through fun at an age when a child’s span of concentration was short.

3.13 Sian Wyn Siencyn, Senior Lecturer, Trinity College, Carmarthen raised a number of training issues emphasising the need for essential and consistent training provision. At the moment some 22 colleges of further education offered approximately 40 qualifications some with accreditation. Early years modules geared to the very young were needed. Providers and helpers in playgroups and Cylchoedd were to be encouraged to study and train for a qualification. The National Assembly should endeavour to ensure a training framework to equip staff to qualify as providers for under 5’s. She drew attention to the use by TEC’s of a sum of £1m for development and questioned whether this had been put to best use. As part of their study of training the Committee were invited to consider the place of special education and ethnic needs, amongst others.

3.14 Prof Jackson drew attention to two themes, that early years education needed a strategy from birth through school with day care included and the importance of research. Recent work had shown for example that formal schooling at 3 and 4 years could be less than beneficial and was more damaging to boys who were reluctant to sit and concentrate for other than short periods. It had been established that this could link directly to disaffection and delinquency in later life.

3.15 The organisation promised to provide a bibliography of relevant research papers to the Clerk who would liaise with the National Assembly Library to have them made available to Members.
3.16 The Chair thanked all contributors for their presentations which had necessarily been constricted by time. He suggested that an opportunity be found for Sian Wyn Siencyn and Prof Jackson to return to the Committee to discuss in more detail the points raised. The Assembly Secretary suggested that of the research that had been referred to within the submissions, the New Zealand experience was worth reviewing.

Action: the Clerk to arrange the additional presentations for the meeting on Wednesday 15 December.

PRE 16 07-99 (min) - 3 November 1999

Agenda Item 3: Policy Development: Early Years Provision for 3 Year Olds - Presentation by Professor Sonia Jackson

3.1 The Chair welcomed Professor Jackson - who was accompanied by Pat Davies of Children in Wales - and reminded Members that she had been invited to address the Committee following her, all too brief contribution to the meeting on 13 October.

3.2 Professor Jackson referred to the paper she had prepared for the Committee attached as Annex 1. She stated that early child development had been the subject of extensive research over the past fifty years, the research falling into three groups: the nature of early childhood and influences on development, the relationship between early learning and later achievement and the structure of schooling and the space accorded to children in society.

3.3 She emphasised that there was a general consensus that education provision below statutory school age in the UK represented a hot-potch approach with no coherent policy in place. School starting ages varied internationally, comparisons of test scores on reading, writing and mathematics showed that children who started formal learning no earlier than age 6 did better on tests at age 8 than those who started at 5. Professor Jackson referred to the differing rates of development, which depended on a number of factors. Inappropriate introduction to formal education at an early age led to some children disengaging from education at an early age, this was particularly true of young boys. In her view there was a clear need for a comprehensive strategy for early years education for the age group from 3 to 5 inclusive. This strategy should be based on best practice and in learning based on enjoyment, motivation and experience.

3.4 Points raised in discussion included:

- the potential lack of suitably qualified teachers to provide both care and education to children between the ages of 3 and 5;
- whether a second modern foreign language could be successfully introduced to this age group;
- the drawback in having to wait for students/teachers to attain an appropriate qualification; and
- whether any research had been undertaken into parental expectation of provision and progress from 3 years and up.

3.5 Professor Jackson was aware of early years provision which included out of school hours care
for working parents; a second language could be used to good effect as already evidenced in
the work of the Meithrin groups in Wales; incentives might be considered for teacher training
establishments to encourage them to offer suitable courses. University College, Swansea was
currently offering the only degree course in childhood studies, Professor Jackson hoped that
other providers could be encouraged to follow suit; where this would cause delay in supplying
qualified teachers best use could be made of existing experienced resources. Pat Davies
mentioned that Children in Wales were conducting a survey of early years and childcare
training upon which they would be consulting. On parental expectations Professor Jackson felt
that parents would have sensible views on what was constructive and purely recreational play.

3.6 The Chair thanked Professor Jackson for her presentation.

Agenda Item 4 : Policy Development - Early Years Provision for 3 Year Olds
- Presentation by WLGA

Paper: PRE 16 07-99(p.3)

4.1 The Chair welcomed representatives of WLGA - Cllr Jeff Jones, Neil Harries, Director of
Education for Caerphilly LEA and Edgar Lewis, Director of Education for Denbighshire. The
Association had responded to the consultation and had agreed to present their views and
provide comments on the cost implications of changes in provision. Cllr Jones highlighted the
key issues, which are contained in the paper attached as Annex 2. The Association wished to
work with the National Assembly to ensure quality provision across Wales which was based on
partnerships with all providers of care and education for children in the public and voluntary
sectors.

4.2 The Members were pleased to note the Association's positive approach to the issue and their
wish to work in partnership to deliver high quality provision. Points raised in discussion
included:

- in socially deprived areas parents were dependent on the public sector, how could future
  provision integrate the principles of 'Sure Start' and the 'Childcare Strategy' for the benefit of
  children introduced to school at an early age?

- a true partnership approach was welcomed but the challenge was ensuring that such
  partnerships worked in practice;

- there was a gap in private provision in deprived areas and in poorer areas of Cardiff there were
  empty places in early year provision, also some parents in areas of deprivation could not
  afford to pay for pre-school care;

- that authorities would need to ensure that there was adequate provision of Welsh medium
  early years education;

- the need to ensure cost effective provision through effective scrutiny of existing standards and
  levels provision;
could the WLGA help the Committee to define what the best system for the children of Wales should be.

4.3 The Association felt that each Local Education Authority’s access to social service and education expertise would provide good in-house co-operation but recognised that effective external expertise would be needed to develop provision. An audit carried out in 1995 revealed that 25% of 3 year olds were in full time provision, 50% in part-time and 50% at home; one aim could be to place 100% of 3 year olds in part-time provision; in a number of areas children enjoyed a mixed provision of LEA and, for example, MYM/PPA during the course of a day. LEAs would be happy to support pilot schemes. The Association would work with the National Assembly to implement the provision but in order to provide considered advice with costings it needed the National Assembly to give it an indication as to what its strategic approach would be.

PRE 16 10-99(min) - 15 December 1999

Agenda Item 5: Policy Development : Early Years Provision for 3 Year olds

5.1 The Chair introduced Professor Edward Melhuish who had provided a response to the early years’ consultation and had been invited to address the Committee on the lessons to be learnt from the European experience of early years’ provision.

5.2 Professor Melhuish had gathered information from his own research, other reading and two longitudinal studies on pre-school education in England and Ireland that he was currently participating in. He demonstrated to the Committee how the family background of children impacted on the early years’ provision that the child received. Copies of the data slides referred to are at Annex B.

5.3 Research identified in 1993 had shown that demand for pre-school provision was linked to its availability and to parental employment. The figures at that time showed that most countries in Europe had a higher level of parental full time employment and corresponding widespread provision for children from 3 years. Changes in the employment patterns of women, in particular, in the UK were moving the UK towards the European model of provision for children of 3 years and above. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) report to issue in Spring 2000 would provide information on the impact of family characteristics on child progress over the pre-school years.

5.4 He posed the question of what form provision should take. Recent and forthcoming reports showed that childcare emerged from two sources, the educational base which then expanded to take on the care element and the opposite source. Experience in Scandinavian countries showed that pre-school children learn best from a practical and structured approach to skills and facts introduced through the medium of play, subsequent progress at age 6 is better than in the UK.

5.5 The key to delivering high quality provision was to have appropriately trained and experienced staff. Most European countries had a three-year college based qualification with a high proportion of practical experience. In some countries students could not start this course until they were 20. In Wales he would suggest that the Committee look at developing a training
programme based on the NVQ model of building on experience but progressing through measurable units.

5.6 The ratios of staff to children were also important. At the age of 3 to 6 staff:child pupil ratio is 1:8 for full time and 1:13 for part time. In his opinion this overall ratio was not as important as ensuring that every child worked in a small group with ratios of 1:1 or 1:2 for at least an hour a day. There were advantages to both high and low ratios and both experiences were of value to the development of children’s skills. It was more important that children had regular provision as opposed to providing full time children for some and nothing for others. It had been shown that it was the regularity of provision that gave the best outcomes.

5.7 Wales had been very successful through Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin in providing bilingual provision. The European experience was that children were rarely introduced formally to a second language until much later but a higher proportion of children in Europe lived in a multi-lingual culture. Wales should ensure that this provision is maintained.

5.8 In Professor Melhuish’s opinion the best examples of provision for young children could be found in Scandinavia and Northern Italy. These countries and regions had a long history of providing high quality public sector childcare. He advocated that any training programme in Wales should include within it opportunities to work for short periods in these countries and regions. He believed that this would be an excellent way of introducing trainees to best practice and open their minds to new ways of delivering care and education to young children.

5.9 The Assembly Secretary reminded the Committee that they had been invited to the opening of the Reggio Emilia Exhibition which she was opening in Cardiff on 4th January. This was an excellent example of the work of Infant- Toddler and pre-school centres in the Reggio region of Italy.

5.10 The Chair thanked Professor Melhuish for his interesting and stimulating presentation. He reminded Members that they had received the collated comments of all respondents and an outline report with their papers for the last meeting PRE 16 09-99(p.1). He asked that Members take time over the Christmas recess to read these documents and to consider in particular the issues that the Committee need to consider in coming to their conclusions and recommendations. In order to facilitate discussion at the next meeting on 26th January he asked that Members let the Clerk have by 17th January their comments on the issues that had been identified and in particular if they wanted other issues to be included. The Clerk would draw these together into a paper for consideration at the next meeting.

5.11 The Chair reminded the Committee that they were to present their final report to the Assembly before the Easter recess and this meant that the final report had to be agreed at the meeting on 1st March.
5.1 The Chair reminded the Committee that they had received all planned presentations and had received written submissions from a number of organisations and individuals. A draft report had been prepared which summarised the work undertaken to date and identified the key issues that the Committee had to consider in coming to its final conclusion and recommendations. Once the Committee had agreed the report it would be laid before Plenary for debate, a provisional date of 4th April had been given for the debate.

5.2 The Assembly Secretary drew Members attention to the issues, which were grouped under six main headings and said that she looked forward to hearing Members’ views on them. In particular she was interested to hear whether the Committee endorsed the principles set out in the paper underpinning early learning and development. The Chair put this specific point to the Members who confirmed that they were in agreement with the principles as set out in the draft report.

5.3 The Assembly Secretary highlighted a number of other key areas that the Committee would need to consider and agree upon. On a separate issue she wished to explore alternative modes of learning and development to the current curriculum arrangements for 5-year-olds in school. She accepted that this was a longer-term issue as a major review of the National Curriculum had just been completed and schools from September 2000 would implement the changes. She proposed that a study be undertaken to consider the national curriculum for 5 year olds based on good practice in the United Kingdom and internationally. This review would feed into the next major review of the National Curriculum, which would start in some 2 to 3 years time.

5.4 The Committee agreed that this would be a useful study, which could inform the next curriculum review.

5.5 The Chair asked Members to consider the draft report before them. The discussion on pattern of provision that would be most appropriate for Wales highlighted the wide range of options that were available. Members concluded that they lacked the expertise and broad overview of what ‘best practice’ was in the United Kingdom, Europe and elsewhere. It was essential that what was introduced in Wales was appropriate to the needs of Wales, especially as each 3 year old would have a statutory right to it. They agreed that the child’s needs were paramount and any provision should have the child at its centre. As to providers Members were of the view that there needed to be a ‘mixed economy’ of provision so as to ensure parental choice for their child, this should be delivered holistically through true partnerships between providers.

5.6 The Chair proposed that the Committee should appoint an expert adviser to evaluate the information received by the Committee, consider best practice in other countries and provide a report to the Committee together with recommendations about what would be best provision in Wales.

The Members agreed this proposal. The Chair asked the Clerk to liaise with the Assembly Secretary’s officials to draft a remit for the expert adviser for the Committee to consider at its next meeting. It was agreed that the paper should be circulated to Members by Friday 4th
February together with a paper explaining the procedure to be followed in appointing the expert adviser. It was further agreed that the expert adviser should be appointed before Easter if at all possible.

PRE 16 02-00(min) - 9 February 2000

Agenda Item 2: Policy development - Provision for Early Years
Paper: - PRE 16 02-00(p.1)

2.1 The Chair reminded Members that at its last meeting (26 January) the Committee had agreed that it should appoint an Expert Adviser to assist it with the next part of the review. Annex A to the paper before the Committee comprised a job specification, a person specification and a draft press notice. Members were invited to agree each.

2.2 In discussion the following points arose:

- it was acknowledged that work was progressing well;
- it was suggested that emphasis was needed on identifying the best form of learning that could be delivered for children of this age;
- the expert adviser should be committed to equality of opportunity and take account of the National Assembly’s policy on social inclusion;
- there was a need to ensure that a Welsh dimension, a knowledge of European best practice and a commitment to educational content - as well as care - would feature in the specification for the post;
- the reference in the job specification to ‘child care and early years’ should be amended to read ‘early years education and child care’ and that the references to playgroups should read ‘voluntary’ playgroups;
- that ‘provisional implications’ should read ‘financial implications’;
- that the reference in the advert to a need for an awareness of current practice should be strengthened, similarly that the relationship of the project to life-long learning should be clear;
- the expert adviser should be aware of the training implication associated with any expansion and improvement to the quality of early years provision; and
- it was suggested that the job advert be circulated to Universities in Wales with relevant education departments.

2.3 The Chair reassured the Committee that the papers would indicate the appropriate requirements; the Welsh dimension was covered in the drafts. He also stressed that the expert adviser would be asked to make recommendations essentially on the findings of the consultation and would not be required to undertake new research. If the brief were to be extended to include new work consultancy rules would apply. The Committee agreed the job
specification, person specification and draft advert, subject to the three suggested amendments and the emphasis to be given to ‘awareness of current practice in the person specification’.

2.4 The Chair proposed that the interview panel be the Committee’s public appointments panel - the Chair, the Assembly Secretary and Lorraine Barrett.

2.5 In discussion the following points arose:

- it was suggested that interviews for the post should be bilingual;
- the policy of party balance on the appointments panel had not allowed for a bilingual element to each committee’s nominees; and
- that, in line with the guidance on expert adviser, a panel might interview candidates.

2.6 The Chair advised that all applications and accompanying papers would be translated for scrutiny and interview. It was agreed that Owen John Thomas and Jenny Randerson be included in the interview panel. Suggested dates for sifting and interviewing were included in the paper, the Clerk would confirm Members availability.

2.7 The Chair invited Members to consider the draft interim report, in particular the summary of conclusions, and to let the Clerk have any drafting comments by Friday 11th February. Subject to any drafting amendments arrangements would be made for the Interim Report to be printed in time for a plenary debate on it on 4th April. It was agreed that the extra meeting scheduled for Thursday 17th February to discuss the report was no longer needed.
## Annex E

### Bibliography

**Early Years Education Provision for 3 year olds**

### References

These documents and websites are referred to in the text of the written submissions received or have been referred to in oral submissions.

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Thomas Coram Research Unit

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Paul Hamlyn Foundation

HMSO

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