



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing

Held on **Wednesday March 15, 2023** from **10:15 a.m. to 11:54 a.m.**

Subject matter: An examination of the regulation and administration of public and private early childhood care and education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago.

1. To assess the regulatory framework that governs the Early Childhood Care and Education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago;
2. To assess the performance of Government and Government-assisted ECCE Centres for the period 2017-2022 inclusive of systems implemented to combat learning loss experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic;
3. To assess the health and safety compliance of ECCE Centres; and
4. To assess the ECCE curriculum in relation to preparation of children for primary school

Venue: Virtual via the Zoom platform

Committee Members

The following Committee Members were present:

- Mr. Paul Richards
- Mr. Avinash Singh
- Ms. Vandana Mohit, MP
- Mr. David Nakhid
- Mr. Rohan Sinanan
- Mr. Esmond Forde, MP

The following Committee Members were excused:

- Mr. Roger Munroe, MP
- Ms. Penelope Beckles, MP

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials of the **Ministry of Education** appeared:

- **Dr. Peter Smith**
Chief Education Officer
- **Ms. Carol Bhagwandin**
Director, ECCE
- **Ms. Michelle Collins**
Research Officer
- **Ms. Elizabeth Courtney**
SERVOL Coordinator
- **Ms. Susan Gopaul**
SERVOL Coordinator

The following officials of the **Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT)** appeared:

- **Mrs. Elizabeth Lewis**
Deputy Director – Legal & Regulatory Services (Ag.)
- **Mr. Marlon Bascombe**
Manager- Investigation & Intervention Unit North East

The following officials of the **Tobago House of Assembly- Division of Education, Research and Technology** appeared:

- **Ms. Ann Second**
Technical Advisor
- **Ms. Loraine George-Edoo**
ECCE Manager

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the main themes arising from discussions with the **Ministry of Education**:

Regulation of ECCE Institutions

- i. There is an overall absence of specific legislation to deal with the regulation of early childhood centres in Trinidad and Tobago. The MoE stated that the Chief Parliamentary Counsel (CPC)

was in the process of amending the Education Act to include ECCE services. It was expected that this amendment will be finalized by the year's end.

- ii. The CPC, with support from the MoE Legal Unit, is in the process of amending the Education Act Chap. 39:01.

Monitoring of ECCE Institutions

- iii. Government and Government assisted ECCE centres are monitored on a daily basis by an assigned ECCE administrator, similarly, field officers are assigned to monitor SERVOL centres.
- iv. There was irregular monitoring of Private (Unregistered) ECCE Schools even though most private centres are run from private homes. In such instances, the Ministry has to seek permission to visit these private homes. The main issues highlighted include infrastructural concerns centring on lighting, bathroom facilities and high turnover of staff.
- v. While private centres are mandated to be registered in keeping with the current Education Act, the Ministry has noticed that many centres are emerging without being registered.
- vi. There was a lack of a risk management protocol in place but support is always offered to the ECCE centres. The Ministry maintains that this protocol was being worked on.
- vii. The Ministry of Education was not responsible for shutting down centres. The Public Health Inspectorate was responsible for shutting down centres that are not meeting health and safety standards. The MoE was not aware of any centres that have been shut down. It was mentioned that previously, this information would have been communicated, but presently it is not.
- viii. It was estimated that 50% of private ECCE centres are not compliant with health and safety requirements.

Requirements

- ix. In terms of general teaching requirements, persons must at minimum, have a certificate in early childhood care and education from an accredited tertiary institution.
- x. In terms of health requirements, it was mentioned by the MoE that persons were not required to have first aid qualifications, but the Ministry works with the Ministry of Health to ensure overall health standards at centres are met.
- xi. All schools must have a health and safety policy procedure.
- xii. Registration certificates must be displayed in a prominent location at ECCE institutions

Reports of Incidents

- xiii. The Ministry reported that major infractions were very low at this time and for the last academic year they recorded only two incidents.

The following are the main themes arising from discussions with the **Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago**

Regulation

- i. The Children's Authority is responsible for the licensure of nurseries, not ECCE centres.

Nursery Gap Analysis

- ii. The CATT stated that despite the suspension of the Nursery Gap Analysis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they conducted preliminary research that provided some insight into this area. The CATT also indicated that they do not have a date to continue with the research they have started in this area.

School Placement

- iii. It was estimated that it can take between three to six weeks to transfer a child (to another school) who may have been removed from the custody of their parents.
- iv. The main challenges identified included delay in receipt of documentation (such as birth certificates, immunization records etc.). It may also be a result of lack of spaces at schools to accommodate transfers.

Reports of Abuse

- v. The Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago stated that they do receive reports of abuse at ECCE centres but will provide the exact figure in writing. They stated that when a report is received, investigations were conducted through the usual channels.
- vi. The CATT is concerned about the unregulated nature of Early Childhood Care Sector and recognizes the need to ensure there are regulations and legislation to govern these centres.

The following are the main themes arising from discussions with the **Tobago House of Assembly-Division of Education, Research and Technology**

Registration

- i. There are currently 123 Centres that are not registered.
- ii. DERTech mentioned that the time it takes to become registered is a deterrent for some of the ECCE centres becoming registered
- iii. There is usually a low response rate to registration drives among ECCE Centres. As a result, the DERTech was in the processes of engaging the public.
- iv. The lack of ratification of the law makes it challenging for the DERTech to obtain any information from the private sectors.

Government-assisted ECCE Centres

- v. There is a small number of SERVOL or Government-assisted ECCE Centres in Tobago and they are overcrowded.
- vi. While the Government-assisted centres were overcapacity, the THA-DERTech maintains that the provision of services at these centres was still very good.

Cultural Resistance

- vii. Cultural challenges were observed both with the THA-DERTech and in public.

Internally, it was mentioned that there was some resistance due to any change in management and any changes in strategic direction. It was observed that while persons worked, they were not collaborating well.

- viii. Some private centres may refuse to become registered and conform to regulations and standards. Parents may also be comfortable sending their children to these private institutions.

Identified Gaps

- ix. Lack of ratification of existing laws
- x. Lack of compliance among unregulated centres
- xi. There is a general reluctance of some institutions to become registered
- xii. There is inadequate information on the total number of unregistered institutions
- xiii. Limited standardization at private/public centres

This public hearing can be viewed on demand via our YouTube Channel.

[16th Virtual Meeting - JSC Social Services & Public Administration - Mar 15, 2023 - Early Childhood - YouTube](#)

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

March 22, 2021.