

PRESS RELEASE

“The EYFS doesn’t need to be changed” : early years practitioners express support for current learning framework ahead of government changes

The vast majority of early years practitioners support the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in its existing form, despite government plans to make a number of changes to the framework, a new survey has revealed.

An online survey carried out by a coalition of early years organisations found that over 80% of practitioners felt that children’s development was well supported or very well supported across the prime areas of development by the current EYFS (ie personal, social and emotional development, physical development and communication and language). The survey also found that 60% of respondents judged that children’s development was well or very well supported by the specific areas of learning (mathematics, literacy, understanding the world and expressive arts and design).

The survey reinforces many of the findings of a recent literature review also commissioned by the coalition including the need to keep shape, space and measure central to mathematics; the importance of a stronger focus on technology; and that communication and language are of primary importance.

The online survey, which received over 3000 responses from early years practitioners – the majority (72%) of whom have worked in the sector for more than 10 years – was carried out by the coalition in response to a government review of the EYFS.

According to the Department for Education, the review aims to close the gap for disadvantaged children, to strengthen the development of communication, language and literacy skills and to reduce practitioners’ workload. A government consultation on proposed reforms is due to close on 31 January.

The survey found that practitioners are strongly supportive of the EYFS in its current form, with Communication and Language receiving the highest approval rating of the areas of learning which comprise the EYFS. The core message from the survey is neatly summed up by one response:

EYFS doesn't need to be changed. What must be enhanced are practitioner skills, training and funding available to settings to increase salaries and attract higher calibre teachers. (Manager: Private Nursery: 10+ years' experience)

The lack of resources was a recurring message in the survey in relation to staff time to spend supporting children and families. The unnecessary workload generated by excessive paperwork was frequently mentioned. Comments from respondents suggest that the need for paperwork comes from settings’ interpretations of Ofsted expectations, for example – not from the requirements of the EYFS, demonstrating that changes to the EYFS itself will not change workload pressures.

Practitioners gave a clear message that to close the gap practitioners needed time to work with and support parents and carers in relation to the home learning

environment. Respondents stressed the importance of funding wider early years services and difficulties helping families access the additional support they might need from related services such as speech and language therapists, educational psychologists, mental health services, SEND specialist support, children's centres and health visitors.

Practitioners also expressed the view that a better trained workforce would make more difference to children's outcomes than changes to the EYFS framework – and that needed to be accompanied by improving pay and conditions accordingly:

Until EYFS is funded at the appropriate level to employ staff with professional expertise then there will be many lagging behind, and many in a similar situation as mine where the high calibre staff are on minimum wage and the manager does not draw a salary just to enable us to fulfil the requirements with excellence and stay open. I believe it is not the framework which is the problem and therefore a review of it is a waste of time, effort and resources. (Manager/Owner: Group sessional care: 10+ years' experience)

Beatrice Merrick, Chief Executive of Early Education, said:

We hope that ministers will listen to what early years practitioners are telling them, and not devote further resources to trying to fix something that isn't broken. The messages are really clear that tinkering with the EYFS Statutory Framework isn't going to achieve what ministers hope for. The sector would welcome the opportunity for dialogue with ministers and some fresh thinking about what will really make a difference to children's future life chances.

Notes

1. For further information, contact Beatrice Merrick, Chief Executive, Early Education (email: Beatrice@early-education.org.uk tel: 07712 398672)
2. The report, *Mapping the landscape: practitioners views on the Early Years Foundation Stage* and the previously published literature review, *Getting it right in the Early Years Foundation Stage: a review of the evidence* can be downloaded from: www.early-education.org.uk/getting_it_right_in_the_eyfs
3. The coalition members are Early Education, Early Childhood Forum (ECF), Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN), Early Years Alliance, Keeping Early Years Unique (KEYU), Montessori St Nicholas, National Children's Bureau (NCB), National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), Sector Endorsed Foundation Degrees in the Early Years (SEFDEY), TACTYC: the Association for Professional Development in the Early Years, the British Association for Educational Research (BERA) and the British Early Childhood Education Research Association (BECERA). Other bodies with observer status included unions representing early years interests from the teaching workforce and school leadership (NAHT, ASCL, NEU, NASUWT) and the Teaching Schools Council.