It’s time to talk!

Ahead of the revision of Development Matters, Helen Moylett and Nancy Stewart ask what the Government’s motivations are and call for sector-wide participation.

**CONCERNS**

The way in which the Government is going about rewriting DM is a cause for concern. The Government has launched the rewrite as an afterthought to making the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) align with Year 1, rather than building up from the development pathways from birth. Development Matters must merge seamlessly into the EYFS as a whole and reflect the overarching principles of curriculum and pedagogy.

Following any EYFS changes, which should be based on careful review and consultation, it would make sense to revise the guidance. When the EYFS was altered in 2012 after the Tickell Review, introducing the Prime and Specific areas of learning and making the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning statutory, there was a strong reason to revise DM in line with the changes.

This time, however, the Department for Education (DfE) is commissioning a revised DM in the midst of a piecemeal rewrite of the EYFS. They have started at the wrong end, by rewriting the ELGs and Educational Programmes in Reception. The DfE says the reworked DM will focus on curriculum, and will not be linked to the ELGs. It is difficult to see how curriculum guidance for children in the EYFS can be separate from the path toward the ELGs, as surely these must align. The promised consultation on the EYFS curriculum and pedagogy is coming months will undoubtedly raise many fundamental issues about the early years curriculum, so rewriting DM without reference to the outcome of this debate seems short-sighted.

We particularly oppose the way the Government is splitting the rewrite into two parts. We applied for an advisory group of highly expert practitioners to comment, ‘They can change the layout will be produced, who will be involved and how expert and practitioner input will be gathered. We hope that rather than eventually issuing a finished document, the DfE will ensure that there is wide circulation to a range of experts and practitioners to comment on and improve successive drafts.

For successfully revising what DM was commissioned by the Government in consultation with an advisory group of experts, professionals who also commented on the outcome, content and layout of the document. We applied for an advisory group of experts to be involved and this was in line with the DfE’s stated desire to ensure consistency of curriculum, provision and experience and to make the transition a happy continuation of children’s learning and development.

Schools that do not properly understand or respect the holistic way in which young children develop and learn in the EYFS tend to focus overtly on Reception, literacy and maths as subject areas with formal skills to be learnt. Direct teaching has its place, but literacy and maths are specific areas built on the Prime areas and are best learned through playing and exploring, active learning and creating and thinking critically. Without the right motivation and thinking that come with a holistic approach, many children go into Year 1 already convinced they are failing.

**THE CHALLENGE**

Mr Grenier is a respected early years expert and his challenge for the DfE is to support his work in a democratic and participatory way, allowing the whole sector to be involved. It must ensure a process that can result in guidance covering the whole EYFS, not separating the Reception year. The rewrite of the ELGs and Educational Programmes on each area of learning and the early years assessment consultation was highly uninvolved and unrepresentative, neither involving nor being respectful of the early years sector.

We hope that the rewrite of DM can succeed and be of the same sort of mess. We have a long tradition of principled professionalism in the early years sector and a great deal of expertise built on in the first two iterations of the EYFS and in Development Matters. We are happy to join forces with the Government and the sector to ensure DM is a success in the sector and the future, children and professionals deserve no less.

Helen Moylett and Nancy Stewart are early years consultants and co-authors of Development Matters.