



Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Sector Coalition briefing: responding to the government consultation on the review of the EYFS

24 October 2019

Government has today opened its formal consultation on the changes it proposes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework.¹

The early years sector organisations above have been working together as a coalition to communicate their concerns to ministers and ensure that any changes to the EYFS benefit fully from the knowledge and expertise within the sector. We commissioned a literature review to provide a clear overview of the available evidence and carried out a survey of practitioners which received over 3000 responses. This evidence base and our collective expertise has informed our ongoing dialogue with Department for Education (DfE) officials involved in the drafting of the revised EYFS. That dialogue has led to some small improvements to drafts of the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) and Educational Programmes. We hope the consultation will enable government to hear loud and clear from the sector about how the current draft can be further improved.

The government piloted the revised ELGs in 23 Reception classes, which was a very limited sample. We believe it needs feedback from a much wider range and number of practitioners, teachers and leaders about whether the proposed changes will improve the delivery of the EYFS and achieve the government's key goals around improving communication and language and reducing workload.

The coalition organisations encourage their members to respond to the consultation to highlight those issues which concern them most. We share below a summary of key issues from the literature review and practitioner survey which respondents may wish to bear in mind when responding, as well as referring to any key briefings from their sector body.

¹ <https://consult.education.gov.uk/early-years-quality-outcomes/early-years-foundation-stage-reforms>

Key points

1. The research evidence supports the current structure of the EYFS including the importance of the **prime areas** (Communication and Language (C&L), Physical Development (PD) and Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)). The practitioner survey also demonstrated high levels of support for the current structure, and particularly strong support for the prime areas of learning in their current form. We welcome the decision to leave the architecture of the EYFS unchanged but question the value of redrafting every educational programme and early learning goal. The proposed bulleted format could, inadvertently, lead practitioners to use the statements for tick box assessments. We encourage practitioners to make clear which changes they feel are beneficial and which are not.
2. The research confirms the importance of **communication and language** skills in general, and also as a basis for literacy. This section of the current EYFS is highly rated by practitioners. The evidence provides no justification for reducing the number of ELGs under C&L from three to two while increasing the number of literacy ELGs from two to three. The research provided no evidence to support giving literacy (or mathematics) greater emphasis than any other areas of learning within the EYFS. The increased number of literacy ELGs is also likely to impact on the number of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) as the current statistics show that the ELGs for literacy and maths are already set too high and are achieved by fewer children than other areas of learning. This is likely to work against government's aim of closing the attainment gap. Retaining the ELG Understanding within CL is essential as oral language is the foundation on which literacy rests.
3. The research emphasised the **holistic and interrelated nature of all the areas of learning**. However, the educational programmes and ELGs should be clearly articulated as distinct areas, and the attempt to weave references to communication and language through other areas of learning may not improve clarity or help improve pedagogy.
4. The evidence on early years **mathematics** supports the changes to the **ELG Number** for example in relation to focusing on depth of understanding of numbers to 10. However, the evidence on the importance of locating maths in real world contexts that have meaning for the child, and the importance of spatial thinking for building understanding and skills in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) do not support the removal of the **ELG Shape, Space and Measure**. The evidence around mathematical thinking supports the importance of pattern, but this should not be restricted to numerical patterns as in the proposed new **ELG Numerical Patterns**.
5. The research evidence showed the importance of **Understanding the World** including a stronger emphasis on the teaching of science and the implications of children growing up in a digital age, as well as focusing on citizenship and

children's rights. The revised ELGs in this area of learning need significant changes to address these points.

6. The research affirmed the central importance of the **Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning** (CoETL) - playing and exploring, active learning and creating and thinking critically. These have been emphasised by the growing body of research on self-regulation and executive function. We welcome the decision to leave the Characteristics unchanged, but we believe the introduction of an **ELG on self-regulation** under PSED is not helpful as it is a much-misunderstood term and its use here is both confused and confusing. Emotional aspects of self-regulation fall under PSED but many other aspects are more appropriately located within the CoETL.
7. Practitioners made clear the importance of the **close relationship between the EYFS Statutory Framework and the non-statutory guidance** including *Development Matters*. This in turn means that one document cannot be changed without addressing the supporting documents which are heavily used by the sector. Consulting on partial changes without the detail of how this fits into the entire Framework and non-statutory guidance is therefore problematic.
8. The survey results clearly showed that practitioners did not consider the EYFS Statutory Framework to be generating unnecessary **workload**. Rather, it is the way non-statutory guidance documents are used as checklists which is problematic. Practitioners' lack of confidence in their professional knowledge can lead to an over-reliance on paperwork to evidence learning. It was also attributed to pressures to meet perceived or actual requirements from Ofsted, local authorities or leaders and managers. However, practitioners in our survey did not suggest local authority moderation should be removed. When done well there is no need for it to generate additional data. Moderation meetings are in some cases the only early years-specific training reception teachers receive, and removal of this requirement would further hollow out the early years expertise in local authorities.
9. Practitioners also made clear that the changes proposed will not drive improvement for **children's outcomes, or social mobility** as it is not the EYFS document itself that drives this but the quality of the home learning environment, appropriate funding and the expertise of early years practitioners. Survey respondents indicate a need for improved funding, specialised training and resources to release practitioners to engage with families and other professionals, as well as to provide greater support to children who may need additional time and attention.

Practitioners may wish to access the Literature Review (available in full) and Practitioner Survey findings (key points available and full report to follow soon) for more detailed understanding of the evidence base: www.early-education.org.uk/getting_it_right_in_the_evfs The coalition organisations will also in many cases also be providing their own briefings to members on key issues and concerns.