

Learning to Learn

A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning

December 2012

FOCUSED CONSULTATION RESPONSE BOOKLET

If you require this document in an alternative format (such as in large print, in Braille, or electronic) and/or language, please contact the Early Years Strategy Team by any of the following methods:

	Direct line: 028 91 279413/279518
	Textphone: 18001 028 279413/279518
	Fax: 028 91 279 100
	E mail: de.earlyyears@deni.gov.uk

(If completing this booklet in Word, please use "Print Layout" view)

Name:

Una Lappin

**Your organisation
(if applicable):**

South Belfast Partnership Board

Address:

23 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1FY

I am responding:

As an individual

On behalf of an organisation

Date:

31st January 2013

Please complete and return this form by 31 January 2013 to:

Early Years Education and Learning
Early Years Strategy Team
Room 109
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Bangor Co Down BT19 7PR

Telephone number: 02891 279413/279518

Or by email: de.earlyyears@deni.gov.uk

About this Focused Consultation

This focused consultation provides an important opportunity for you to consider if any of the proposed actions for early years education and learning require further refinement. This document should be read alongside the Framework document.

The Department would encourage organisations/groups which work on behalf of or with children and young people to seek the views of the children and young people they work with, as well as workers and parents. Where organisations do this, it would be helpful if they would clearly distinguish whether the views represent the organisation, an individual or groups of people or organisations.

How to Respond

This response booklet refers to **comments on the proposed actions** set out in the *Framework for Early Years Education and Learning*, which is available electronically at www.deni.gov.uk or on request by emailing de.earlyyears@deni.gov.uk or telephone on 02891 279413/279518

Consultation responses can be made by email to de.earlyyears@deni.gov.uk , or in writing using this response form.

To enable responses to be analysed effectively, please only use this form.

The consultation period will conclude on **31 January 2013**.

Confidentiality and Freedom of Information

The Department will publish a summary of responses following completion of the focused consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the focused consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely the Department in this case. The right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential, any information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, the Department does have the responsibility to decide whether any information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential.

Further Copies

The consultation document and this response booklet are available electronically at www.deni.gov.uk or on request by emailing de.earlyyears@deni.gov.uk or by telephone on 02891 279413/279518

Raising Standards

Key action

1.1 The Department will redefine the pre-school programme to focus on children in their pre-school year.

Do the actions under 1.1 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

In legislating to define the age range we at the South Belfast Partnership Board (SBPB) feel the proposed framework has no immediate relevance to a large number of 0-6 year olds i.e. the 75% of 0-3 year old who do not live in Sure Start wards.

We believe the concept of early childhood education and care 'an integrated approach to improving outcomes' is paramount when engaging with young children's lives and needs. Early years in this context includes services for all young children and play, care and learning experiences for children provided in either voluntary, community, statutory or home based settings. It is also imperative to acknowledge the importance of the antenatal period for child development.

In addition we feel that specific provision is required to provide equity to children from a black and minority background and special needs. The current provision does not incorporate these communities of interest which is essential as Section 75 refers to the importance of equity of service.

To ensure these children can grow and flourish to their full potential additional input and support in their pre-school years is key.

Raising Standards

Key action

- 1.2 The Department will ensure that experiences in primary school build more effectively on the child's previous education and learning experiences.

Do the actions under 1.2 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

We at the SBPB believe that along with pre-school education and learning experiences other variables need to be considered including the context of the child's wider family and take into account family issues, inclusive of health - e.g. poor mental health/ depression, debt, number of other children and so on.

We would also ask the Department what action has been taken to produce a child friendly version of this consultation and how it has engaged with children and young people. Children in Europe have highlighted the participation of children as an essential value, stating that services should embody participation as an expression of democracy and as a means to combat social exclusion and should mean the active inclusion of the entire community.

We would also emphasise that engagement with children and young people must include young children as well as young adults, noting the research evidence which demonstrates that from an early age children do exhibit small but significant cultural and political awareness.

It is important also to ensure there are links established with the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership.

Raising Standards

Key action

1.3 The Department will apply the principles of Every School a Good School to all DE funded early years provision.

Do the actions under 1.3 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

We at the SBPB, on the whole believe that standards are rising across the sector, and the 80:20 rule seems to apply, where 80% of all early years settings provide high quality service. Where we feel the system fails is when we are dealing with children that are not 'typical' and have additional learning / behavioural needs. In this context, we believe that you can only address standards if you have the right provision in place.

We are discouraged that there is no reference to how the Sure Start programmes are co-ordinated anywhere in the Framework i.e. localised, multi-sectoral partnerships working through a community development approach. Sure Start programmes, of which there is one in South – South Belfast Sure Start, work to support and improve outcomes for individual families and children but also the communities where they live. As you are aware, this was one of the 4 original aims of Sure Start in NI – “Strengthening Families and Communities” – and what makes Sure Start distinctive from the majority of core funded government programmes. We feel if this management and partnership model is not valued and actively promoted by the Department where it is weak the impact of Sure Start in NI will be greatly lessened. ‘Value for money’ will also be undermined if contributors to the programmes (including parents) are not recognised as stakeholders who must be genuinely involved in decision-making at both the local and regional level as after all their children are users of the service.

Closing the Performance Gap

Key action

- 1.4 The Department will review how early years education and learning services are effectively targeted to address barriers to learning and enhance access and equity.**

Do the actions under 1.4 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

The SBPB would welcome the majority of the actions in this section with the qualifications already expressed regarding points c) and d). In regards to e) we would point that the lack of an integrated education approach can undermine inclusion. An example of this is what is termed 'intimate care'. Often children with special educational needs, disabilities or sometimes those whose parents fail to provide appropriate care will require support with toileting and other personal care. There is evidence that many children are excluded or receive reduced hours because they cannot manage all their personal care independently.

To add, the quality and effectiveness of services, and therefore the potential outcomes for children and parents when addressing barriers may also be limited by the lack of investment or strategic support in regards to physical capacity that is 'fit for purpose', sustainable and compliant with Minimum Standards regulations.

Closing the Performance Gap

Key action

1.5 The Department will collaborate with other departments to work towards a common goal of improving outcomes for children.

Do the actions under 1.5 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

Education extends to early years and the aspiration has to be that we ensure that each child reaches their own full potential.

The SBPB would seek clarification on the Departments definition of 'evidence based'. We could not support the drift away from parent, family and child centred services which are based on personalised and relationship based approaches with an empowerment ethos as opposed to rigid, manualised or 'one size fits all' programmes which give more weight to the needs of the evidence collectors than the families and children themselves.

We support the improvement of co-ordination of service delivery to individual families linking into the Family Support Hubs.

Developing the Education Workforce

Key action

1.6 The Department will establish appropriate support mechanisms to drive up standards in pre-school provision and disseminate best practice.

Do the actions under 1.6 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

The recognition that “children’s needs cross organisational boundaries” is most welcome from the SBPB.

Regarding point c) we would like to see the connection made between brain development, attachment issues and improved practice in supporting children’s capacity to self-regulate their emotions as a vital component of learning.

Developing the Education Workforce

Key action

- 1.7 The Department will work with DHSSPS to develop protocols for delivery bodies to enhance information sharing, early identification and intervention services for children and families at risk, and review joint training requirements across disciplines as well as improving inter-professional communication.

Does the action under 1.7 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

The SBPB welcomes the Department working in collaboration with DHSSPS to develop protocols for delivery bodies to enhance information sharing, early identification and intervention services for children and families at risk, and review joint training requirements across disciplines as well as improving inter-professional communication.

It is important to ensure these protocols are implemented and reviewed in a timely manner as good practice.

Improving the Child's Learning Environment

Key action

1.8 The Department will revise the pre-school programme to ensure that all target age children benefit from an equitable pre-school experience.

Do the actions under 1.8 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

The SBPB welcomes the Department revising the pre-school programme to ensure that all target age children benefit from an equitable pre-school experience.

Regarding point c) SBPB would strongly welcome any move to increase staff to child ratios in nursery schools and any attempt to reduce 'settling in time' and provide some consistency across nursery schools and P1's.

Improving the Child's Learning Environment

Key action

1.9 The Department will over time standardise patterns of attendance as part of the pre-school programme.

Do the actions under 1.9 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

We at the SBPB welcome the Department plan to standardise patterns of attendance as part of the pre-school programme.

Regarding point a) we strongly disagree with this point. The EPNI research on which this is based only considered cognitive benefits and also did not disaggregate outcomes for children on the basis of socio-economic background. A large Californian study found that disadvantaged 2-3 year olds require a minimum of 15 hours to maximise cognitive benefits.

Improving the Child's Learning Environment

Key action

1.10 The Department will adopt an area based approach to managing the early year's estate and consider the optimum use of premises.

Do the actions under 1.10 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

SBPB agree the need for the Department to adopt an area based approach in order to manage the early year's estate and consider the optimum use of premises.

It is imperative to include the needs of parental and community engagement and an assessment of the ICT infrastructure requirements in moving with the technological times.

Transforming the Governance and Management of Education

Key action

1.11 The Department will ensure the effective planning, management and co-ordinated delivery of early year's education and learning services.

Do the actions under 1.11 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

The SBPB support the need for the Department to effectively plan, manage and co-ordinate the delivery of early year's education and learning services.

It is imperative to ensure the delivery is always appropriate to the individual family unit, abilities and circumstances.

Communication needs to be clear and concise and governance needs to be in place along with good practice in order to achieve this.

Transforming the Governance and Management of Education

Key action

1.12 The Department and ESA will implement all remaining actions in the Review of Pre-School Admission Arrangements aimed at streamlining and simplifying the system for accessing pre-school places.

Does the action under 1.12 require any further refinement?

Yes

No

No strong view

Please use this space to set out the refinements you consider need to be made.

SBPB would like to see admissions for nurseries and playgroups streamlined and simplified for parents/guardians as a priority. Early January is an inappropriate deadline for applications for admission in September.

There are too many children losing out on a pre-school year because they have resided in Northern Ireland after the January deadline or whose parents cannot/do not complete applications due to a range of social and language barriers. Unfortunately, as well documented, these are often the very children who are most in need of the pre-school year.

Please use the box below to add any additional comments.

This response is on behalf of the South Belfast Partnership Board and the South Belfast Health and Wellbeing Forum. The members of the Health and Wellbeing Forum include a wide range of community, voluntary and statutory organisations. See the list below:

- Forum for Alcohol and Substance Abuse (FASA)
- Donegall Pass Community Forum
- Windsor Women's Centre
- Lower Ormeau Residence Action Group
- Ballynaveigh Community Development Association
- Age Sector Platform
- Community Resources Belfast South
- Markets Development Association
- Sandy Row Community Forum
- South Belfast Surestart
- Taughmonagh Community Forum
- Engage with Age
- Markets Community Centre
- Greater Village Regeneration Trust
- South City Resource & Development Centre
- Donegall Pass Community Centre
- Opportunity Youth
- Fitzroy Presbyterian Church
- Contact Youth
- South Belfast Male Care
- Women's Information Northern Ireland
- Taughmonagh Live and Learn Programme
- The Rainbow Project
- GEMS NI
- Northern Ireland Council Ethnic Minorities
- Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- Barnardo's Northern Ireland
- Polish Association
- Chinese Welfare Association
- Belfast Islamic Centre
- Multi-Cultural Resource Centre
- Sólas

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Thank you for taking the time to respond.