



Early Years (0-6) Strategy



Department of
Education

www.deni.gov.uk

AN ROINN
Oideachais

MÁNNYSTRE O
Lear

CONSULTATION RESPONSE



Name: _____
Organisation: _____
Contact Tel No: _____

School Ref No: _____ (if applicable)

Who are you responding on behalf of (please tick as appropriate):

As a Parent:

A School/Playgroup:

An Organisation:

Did you undertake a consultation of Members of your organisation?

Introduction

This Consultation Response Document, prepared by the Department of Education, draws on and complements, but is not intended to replace, the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy. To understand more fully the context within which this consultation is taking place you should read the full draft Strategy document, and supporting evidence paper, which are available from:

The Early Years Team
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Rathgill
Bangor
BT19 7PR

 028 9127 9892

Email: DE.EarlyYearsTeam@deni.gov.uk

Or from the Department of Education website at www.deni.gov.uk

The closing date for responses to be with the Department is 30 November 2010. Responses must be forwarded to the postal or email address above.

Overview

The Department of Education (DE) recognises that the early years in a child's life are a vitally important time. It is during these early months and years of life that a significant level of children's learning takes place, first relationships are made, concepts are developed and the foundations of language and all later skills and learning are laid.

The aim of the new Strategy is to set out a vision and plan for ensuring better outcomes for children by improving the provision and quality of services to the youngest children, their parents and families for the next 5 years. The draft Strategy is a high level document that sets out the direction for travel that will link the range of early years' services for children (0-4) from Education and Health with the new Foundation Stage in the first years of Primary School. It will reflect the drive for cohesion in the policies and services affecting early years so that children and parents get the best outcomes possible.

The draft Strategy, complemented by the evidence paper, seeks to:

- define a framework for the policy direction of DE within the wider approach of the Executive to children's policy; and
- set out key objectives and strategic actions for future development and improvement.

The document sets out a context for the draft Strategy, in both the international perspective and in respect of the position here, in terms of:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC);
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports on early childhood education;
- The relevant PSA targets set by the Assembly;
- The Children (NI) Order 1995;
- The cross-departmental ten year Children and Young People's Strategy 2006-16 "Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge";
- DHSSPS' "Families Matter: Supporting Families";

- The delivery of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP) and Sure Start services, including the Sure Start Programme for two Year Olds.

From this consideration, the document sets out a vision, aims and objectives for the Strategy, within the context of four key priority areas which are:

- i. Quality of provision and outcomes;
- ii. The role of parents and carers is vital;
- iii. Equity of access; and
- iv. The importance of more effective linkages in the delivery of services.

These form the bedrock of the draft Strategy and it is on these in particular that views will be welcomed.

Vision and Aims

It is the purpose of the draft Strategy to define a framework for DE policy and to set out key objectives and actions for future development and improvement. Research and evidence gathered in the development of the Strategy identified the four main priorities indicated above. Based on the evidence and research considered the draft Strategy sets out as its vision:

- *To enable every child to develop to their full potential by giving each one the best start possible.*

Question 1

Is this the right vision? Is it an appropriate vision for an early years strategy?

Yes

No

Please add any comments you have:

Based on existing policy and practice, and on the research, the draft sets out its aims to:

- *value and respect the early years of a child's life, while also laying the foundations of and removing barriers to learning so that each child can develop as a successful learner; and*
- *achieve positive outcomes for children by supporting their development through high quality, child-centred and family-focused services, ensuring greater equality of access.*

In achieving these aims the Department will seek to engage stakeholders involved in early years provision.

Question 2

Do you agree that the aims are appropriate?

Yes

No

Please add any comments you have:

Objectives

In support of the aims and to ensure effective policy making and implementation four key objectives have been defined. For further information on the rationale behind the objectives please see Annex 2 of the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy.

The draft Strategy elaborates on the objectives in terms of what the Department of Education needs to address and what it needs to do under each objective.

Quality of Provision

Objective One: To improve the quality of early years provision thereby promoting better learning outcomes for children by the end of the Foundation Stage, especially in language and number; and in the children's personal and social development, emotional well-being and readiness to learn.

The draft Strategy identifies the following matters which DE needs to address:

- an increased focus upon outcomes by the end of the Foundation Stage especially to raise standards in language and number;
- closure of the gap between those children who are least school ready and those who are most ready;
- provision for those working with children of a common framework for child development across the years 0-6 (taking account of relevant guidance) accompanied by appropriate milestones, the implications for learning and standards and quality indicators against which the provision can be quality assured;
- promotion of the early identification of developmental delays, especially in relation to language and other barriers to learning;
- greater focus on identified special or additional needs and disadvantage to ensure that relevant provision is targeted to provide help to those children who need it most; and
- strengthening the links, on an area basis, between early years providers (from birth to six years of age) at points of transition (currently Sure Start (0-4), pre-school (3-4) and Foundation Stage (4-6)), to ensure progression in learning and development and the exchange of relevant information.

Question 3

Are these the key issues for DE to address?

Yes

No

Question 4

Do you consider that there are other areas that should be addressed to improve quality of provision?

The draft Strategy proposes that DE will undertake the following actions:

- i. DE will take steps to improve outcomes at the end of Foundation Stage by the following actions:-
 - a. DE will commission ETI to work with the HSCTs, ESA, and others to set out the milestones to be expected in a child's development up to the end of the Foundation Stage and to identify best practice to achieve them. These will focus particularly on physical, personal, social and emotional development, intellectual and language and numeracy development and will promote more effective progression for children;
 - b. DE and DHSSPS will commission ETI, Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority and HSCT to develop a Quality Framework for the registration and evaluation of early years provision. The Framework will comprise a broad outline of child development and the key milestones, the implications of these for quality learning provision along with the DHSSPS Minimum Standards and the ETI quality indicators to guide self-evaluation and regulation and inspection;
 - c. In light of the work set out especially at b. above, DE will require ESA to review the pre-school curriculum and advise DE on how

- it should be updated to ensure a coherent and complementary approach across the early years;
- d. DE in collaboration with DHSSPS and HSCTs, will address issues of underperformance or inadequate provision in pre-school settings and in the Foundation stage, identified through inspection, to ensure that the highest standards are achieved and maintained; and
 - e. DE will seek to identify an appropriate mechanism to capture progression in child development and learning linked to the milestones developed by ETI.
- ii. DE will develop a co-ordinated approach to early years provision to ensure smooth transitions with appropriate exchanges of information at the different stages through the following actions:-
- a. DE will commission research and evaluation from ETI and other sources to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of provision and of the transitions into pre-school and primary school; it will focus in particular, on the assessment of the children's development and progression in learning, provision for SEN, the transfer of information and the continuity of the curriculum;
 - b. DE will commission ESA to address, on an area basis, the issues relating to two year olds in nursery provision and to reception classes in primary schools to ensure that provision is age appropriate;
 - c. DE will work with DHSSPS to develop a mechanism (drawing on existing data sources where appropriate) by which key information can be shared more effectively so that relevant agencies can access the most up-to-date information on the child with a view to addressing any identified areas of difficulty; and
 - d. DE will work with DHSSPS to promote the use of the Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland (UNOCINI) assessment tool across children's services as a comprehensive single means of assessing recording and communicating across agencies to improve the early identification of difficulties and appropriate interventions.

Question 5

Do you agree with the actions proposed?

Yes

No

Please add any comments you have about the actions proposed:

Question 6

What further actions could be taken to ensure that the objective is achieved?

The Role of Parents and Carers

Objective Two: To recognise and respect the role of parents and carers of young children and to raise the level of engagement by DE (and its partners) with families and communities.

The draft Strategy identifies the following matters which DE needs to address:

- the quality of communication with parents;
- the engagement with parents in support of their child's learning and development so that they can fulfil their key role as the first educators

of their children and to strengthen the partnership between parents and early years staff;

- the need to work with parents of children in funded provision to address any barriers to learning their children face, including SEN;
- the impact of the health, care and learning services provided to parents in disadvantaged areas through Sure Start Programmes; and
- the incorporation of play-based learning, including access to outdoor play, in early years provision, recognising that play is a vital part of the informal learning in early childhood.

Question 7

Are these the key issues for DE to address?

Yes

No

Question 8

Do you consider that there are other areas that should be addressed to recognise and respect the role of parents and to raise the level of engagement?

The draft Strategy proposes that DE will undertake the following actions:

- i. DE will promote close and collaborative working between parents and early years providers to assist their vital role in supporting their children's learning by the following actions:-
 - a. DE through ESA will put in place a family programme in funded pre-school provision to increase awareness amongst parents of the child development milestones and to assist them with the early identification of additional or SEN. In this way it is intended

- that parents will themselves become involved in the removal of barriers to learning. This programme will take full account of existing good practice;
- b. DE will ensure the effective provision of information and advice to parents on the availability of early years services and will collaborate with DHSSPS in the Families Matter Strategy; and
 - c. DE will consult with parents in order to ensure that their views are incorporated into policy formulation. ESA and other appropriate bodies (including Sure Start) will consult with parents on the development of early childhood services.
- ii. DE will build support for parents in areas of disadvantage by working with partners to support the capacity of parents to assist with their children's learning by the following actions:-
- a. DE will seek to expand the reach of Sure Start and the Programme for Two Year Olds to improve support for children and families living in areas of highest disadvantage;
 - b. DE will work with OFMDFM in the development of the Play and Leisure policy. ESA will provide families with information on their role in encouraging the value of play, including outdoor play, in the development of early learning; and
 - c. DE will promote the importance of regular attendance in early years settings.

Question 9

Do you agree with the actions proposed?

Yes

No

Please add any comments you have about the actions proposed:

Question 10

What further actions could be taken to ensure that the objective is achieved?

Equity and Access

Objective Three: To improve equity and access to early years provision.

The draft Strategy identifies the following matters which DE needs to address:

- the funding issues between providers in relation to pre-school provision raised in the Chief Inspector's Report 2006-08 and the need to ensure that resources are used as effectively as possible to improve services;
- qualification levels, professional development and access to specialist support for the early years workforce in the interest of greater equity between the statutory and non-statutory providers and of raising standards;
- the provision of appropriate Irish-medium education as appropriate for those who wish to avail of it;
- the developmental Programme for Two Year Olds and their parents in areas of disadvantage, particularly linked to Sure Start;
- the delivery of early years provision that is appropriate to age and stage of development and aligns with best practice; and
- the identification and dissemination of good practice across early years provision for children with additional or special needs.

Question 11

Are these the key issues for DE to address?

Yes

No

Question 12

Do you consider that there are other areas that should be addressed to improve equity and access to early years provision? If so, what are they?

The draft Strategy proposes that DE will undertake the following actions:

- i. DE will increase the skills of the workforce in DE funded early years settings by promoting a higher level of qualifications and wider access to professional development through the following actions:-
 - a. DE, with DEL, ESA, and other relevant bodies, will work towards raising the minimum level of qualifications for those working in all DE funded early years settings, including Sure Start, to an NVQ level 3; the minimum level of qualification for the leader-in-charge will be raised to NVQ level 4 or above;
 - b. ESA will secure or procure an “early years leadership programme” and provide access to it for those currently in leadership in funded pre-school provision;
 - c. ESA, working in conjunction with ETI, will identify and disseminate ‘best practice’ drawing from both statutory and voluntary/private funded early years provision to promote quality across the entire early years workforce; and
 - d. DE will seek to support the non-statutory sector through capacity building to ensure they can benefit fully from the opportunities offered by the SEN policy.

-
- ii. DE will take steps to address issues of access to early years provision by the following actions:-
- a. DE will consider changes to the funding mechanisms to address the equality issues in pre-school education taking account of resource constraints;
 - b. ESA and the HSCs will devise a mechanism through the existing partnership structures, to manage the allocation of pre-school places on an area basis and to ensure that provision is age-appropriate;
 - c. Given that early years provision is offered through small units and that some pre-school children still take up reception places in primary school. ESA will introduce an area-based approach to the planning, delivery and support of early years provision to ensure that knowledge, expertise, good practice and resources are shared more widely across the providers and that provision is age appropriate;
 - d. All voluntary and private pre-school providers who are funded through the Pre-School Expansion Programme will be required to work within the revised SEN framework;
 - e. ESA will provide access to development and to informed advice and expertise from the full range of pupil support services for staff in funded pre-school settings. This support will be managed through the 'area-based' area approach referred to above;
 - f. DE will develop proposals to improve access to Irish-medium pre-school provision;
 - g. DE will maintain part-time provision with the statutory pre-school sector; any changes to such provision will be based on criteria linked to access and to disadvantage; and
 - h. DE will seek to expand provision for two year olds.

Question 13

Do you agree with the actions proposed?

Yes

No

Please add any comments you have about the actions proposed:

Question 14

What further actions could be taken to ensure that the objective is achieved?

Collaboration and Integration

Objective Four: To encourage greater collaboration among key partners to promote greater integration in service delivery.

The draft Strategy identifies the following matters which DE needs to address:

- the primary focus of interventions must remain, at all levels, on the child and their needs;
- better involvement among the key partners particularly education, health and social care, to ensure a more joined-up and integrated approach, especially in relation to early intervention strategies; and
- the contribution of early years provision to the wider Executive consideration of childcare policy.

Question 15

Are these the key issues for DE to address?

Yes

No

Question 16

Do you consider that there are other areas that should be addressed to encourage greater collaboration among key partners to promote greater integration in service delivery? If so, what are they?

The draft Strategy proposes that DE will undertake the following actions:

- i. DE will seek to develop and promote collaborative partnerships both within and outside government to ensure that a coherent view is taken of the needs of the child by the following actions:-
 - a. DE will contribute to the Executive's actions for children in relation to the early years and will work with other departments to embed these in the next Programme for Government, including the development of relevant Public Service Agreement targets;
 - b. DE will require ESA and the Public Health Agency to develop more integrated provision in the delivery of its early years services;
 - c. ESA and the Health and Social Care Board/Public Health Agency will work together on evaluation and sharing of data; and
 - d. DE and DHSSPS will explore the optimum use of existing accommodation to promote greater integration of services.

- ii. DE and DHSSPS will work through ESA and the Health and Social Care Board/Public Health Agency to develop the most effective structures for the collaborative regional planning of services and how best to develop more integrated services in early years provision by the following actions:-
- a. DE will commission ETI to inspect and report on the quality of the learning provision in all early years settings; DE will consult with DHSSPS, on how the HSCT regulatory function should align with the quality improvement role of ETI to ensure the highest possible standards of provision set out in the proposed quality framework;
 - b. DE will collaborate with DHSSPS to improve health and social and educational outcomes for children and their families. DE intends to address issues around speech and language provision and health and social well-being; and
 - c. in order to promote issues of healthy eating and nutrition, DE will expand the remit of its current nutrition associates who currently work with ETI in primary schools, to work in pre-school settings.

Question 17

Do you agree with the actions proposed?

Yes

No

Please add any comments you have about the actions proposed:

Question 18

What further actions could be taken to ensure that the objective is achieved?

Additional Comments

If you have any additional comments you wish to make about the draft Strategy please use the box below.



Department of
Education

www.deni.gov.uk

AN ROINN
Oideachais

MÁNNYSTRIE O
Lear

