

AAIA comments relating to the May 2012 draft of the EYFS Handbook

The following comments are made in response to the STA email of 9th May 2012 when the draft handbook for the new EYFS Profile was shared with LA Profile Moderation managers. AAIA has many members who are Profile Moderation Managers and the Association therefore welcomes the opportunity to comment on the new Profile.

In general, the principles of high quality early years practice, and the assessment practice stemming from this, are well-expressed in the draft handbook. However, the Association has some concerns and these are detailed below. These comments do not relate to the content of the ELGs themselves as it is assumed that these are not open to amendment at this point in time. Rather the comments relate to the content of the Handbook, issues about how the Profile will be understood and used, and the timescale for its introduction.

The Association wishes to make the following points:

- We are concerned about the different ways in which the Development Matters and early learning goals are expressed. If it is the case that the ELGs are expressed as continuous text to discourage the accumulation of scale points during the course of reception year, it is difficult to understand why the Development Matters are designated as bullet points. Even though the Development Matters document states that the statements should not be used as a checklist, the way in which they are presented invites their use in this way. This is particularly the case if the Development Matters have to be used for end of reception year assessments of lower attaining children.
- When the criteria for assessing children exceeding the ELGs are available, practitioners will need to be familiar with three sets of assessment criteria, each of which may be expressed differently. This increases the potential for variability in interpretation, resulting in inconsistent judgements and data that are unreliable.
- If the criteria for assessing children exceeding the ELGs are related to the National Curriculum level descriptions, further complications will arise given that National Curriculum level descriptions and the EYFS areas of learning do not cover the same content. Additionally, practitioners may be faced with further changes when the new National Curriculum is introduced. The implications for the training of teachers in Early Years and Y1 and the transition process, itself a key factor in securing children's effective progress through the NC, are highly significant. They require addressing at this early stage with careful planning to take account of the considerable impending changes.
- There is some confusion in the Handbook about the different but inter-related purposes of assessment and the ways in which the ELGs should be used. For example, at the top of page 6 it says that Profile assessment '*is carried out in the final term of the year in which the child reaches age 5*', the implication being assessment with a summative purpose. At the same time, the Handbook encourages on-going assessment through observation and through high-quality interaction with children. For example, at the bottom of page 6 on-going assessments are focused on: '*from observation and interaction in a range of daily activities*' and on page 7 the '*use of assessment information to plan relevant and motivating learning experiences*' is cited. These quotes identify assessment with a formative purpose, supporting children's on-going learning

and informing practice and provision, whilst over time providing the evidence on which summative assessments can be based.

- Unless the Handbook is clearer about how the different purposes of assessment relate to each other, there is considerable potential for practitioners to be confused about why they are assessing children, how they are to assess, and how their on-going assessments relate to the summative assessments that are required in the summer term. This confusion is likely to distort the intention expressed in the handbook that the ELGs should be used in a best-fit/holistic way in the summer term.
- The definition of assessment given in the appendix, *'assessment involves analysing and reviewing what is known about each child's learning and development to reach informed decisions about the child's level of attainment'* is a definition of summative and not formative assessment. It is important that formative assessment is also defined as it is directly referred to and its use recommended (see bullets 4 and 5 above). In addition, the Handbook needs to clarify how the evidence that accumulates from children's on-going assessments contributes to the summative assessments using the ELGs in the summer term.
- In order to discourage practitioners from using the Development Matters and the ELGs as a checklist of criteria, the most helpful clarification would be advice that helped them use the Development Matters and ELGs to support their planning rather than using them as assessment criteria on an on-going basis. Similarly, if the ELGs are only to be used in the final term of the reception year, there would also need to be advice about to what practitioners' should reference their on-going assessments.
- Such advice will also be helpful in establishing what the expectations of school management, Ofsted inspectors and others need to be when measuring and making judgements about progress.
- The late availability of the final version of the Handbook and accompanying exemplification is creating considerable concern and uncertainty for practitioners. While it can be argued that the final documentation does not need to be available at the start of the new school year, practitioners know that a substantial change is taking place and it is not unreasonable that they should be able to familiarise themselves with it and plan and prepare for the new Profile as soon as possible; publication towards the end of the autumn term is far too late. Newly Qualified Teachers who will be working in the Early Years from September 2012 are at a particular disadvantage given the lack of definitive information. They commence their careers with little or no experience of the previous EYFSP and will find themselves in an information vacuum until their first term is over. The effect on teaching and learning hardly needs outlining.
- The late availability is also very problematic for LA advisers who need access to the new materials in order to plan for both training and moderation. Presumably, guidance on moderation requirements will be available at the same time as the new Profile, but given the demands upon LA teams that have experienced significant reductions in numbers and capacity, it is unacceptable that the requirements for supporting the Profile have not been made available at this point in time. Briefings in January 2013 are too late.