

Report

The logo graphic for 'The Hundred Review' consists of several overlapping, semi-transparent rectangular shapes in shades of red and orange, arranged in a stepped, ascending pattern from bottom-left to top-right. The text 'The Hundred Review' is printed in white on the top-most, solid red rectangle.

The
Hundred
Review

Teaching Four & Five Year Olds: The Hundred Review of the Reception Year in England



Early Excellence
Centre for Inspirational
Learning

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Introduction

1. Context of the Reception Year in schools

1.1. Children in England are required by law to enter full time education by the start of the term after their 5th birthday, thus creating what is described as the 'Reception Year' (YR) in Primary, First and Infant Schools. Although this provides the opportunity for a 'staggered entry' i.e. children entering school at the start of the appropriate term as defined by their date of birth, this has generally been adapted so that children now enter YR at the start of the academic year in which they have their 5th birthday. Many children therefore start school at the age of 4 and this is at odds with the international picture in other developed countries, in which children have historically started statutory 'school' at the age of 6 or 7 years. This earlier start to school in England is an historical legacy from the 1870 Education Act. Against contemporary advice, the Act established this younger age to pacify employers who, relying on juvenile workers, accepted that an earlier starting age would justify an earlier school leaving age and thus make these children available for employment.

1.2. Since the mid-1990s a range of Government policies and initiatives have sought to reconcile the tension which exists between the widespread acceptance of Birth - 7 years old as a specific developmental phase and the fact of school starting age being 5, and latterly 4 years old. Most recently the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Appendix 1) was introduced in 2008 to create a framework that supported the distinct educational phase from Birth to the end of YR. Currently, the EYFS Framework contains the statutory requirements for the 'Learning, Development and Care' for all YR classes; it is distinct from the National Curriculum which prescribes the content for children for Year one (Y1) and above.

1.3. The Ofsted Annual Report for 2015/16 ⁽¹⁾ states that the quality of all Early Years provision has improved year on year between 2012 and 2016; 91% of provision is now rated as good or outstanding. In the same period, the number of good and outstanding Primary Schools has risen to 90% ⁽²⁾.

1.4. Specific outcomes for YR, measured through the statutory EYFS Profile Assessment (Appendix 5) appear to indicate a parallel picture of continual improvement. The percentage of children 'achieving (sic) a good level of development'⁽³⁾ continued to rise to 69.3% in 2016 (Appendix 6). Additionally, the gap between boys' and girls' outcomes is narrowing, as is the gap between the outcomes of the highest attaining and the lowest attaining children.

1.5. However, the position of YR classes within a school context has remained a source of discussion and tension within Primary Schools, First and Infant, particularly in terms of which outcomes are appropriate, what content is delivered, the processes by which teaching and learning take place and the identity of YR within the rest of the school.

1.6. The Teaching Schools Council (TSC) report, 'Effective Primary Teaching Practice' (2016) (Appendix 9), while identifying YR as 'the most important year' expressed concern that there '...is confusion about expectations among Teachers and Heads leading to inconsistency in practice and approach.' Part of the suggested response to these concerns was that 'similarities between Reception and other year groups are emphasised, rather than the differences' and that Schools should consider 'bringing Y1 approaches into Reception'.

1.7. The TSC report (2016) also made the following recommendation: ‘The Department for Education support a review to address the confusion and lack of consistency regarding curriculum and practice in the Reception year. We believe this should be evidence-based and led by Teachers and Leaders from primary Schools, and draw on research and expertise from those with Reception experience in particular. We believe this would support Reception Teachers and help School Leaders to ensure that children enter Y1 fully equipped.’

1.8. Early Excellence, partly in response to the TSC findings and recommendations, and in reaction to the TSC report (2016), undertook to conduct a review of YR drawing on the knowledge and experiences of YR Teachers, Practitioners and Phase Leaders as well as School Leaders and Headteachers. In addition, a review of research into effective pedagogy and appropriate learning and developmental outcomes for children aged 4 – 5 years old was commissioned.

1.9. The evidence for this review, named ‘The Hundred Review’ was gathered from January to March 2017. Launching the review, Liz Marsden, CEO of Early Excellence stated that: ‘Reception is an important year. It has a unique and crucial role in primary education and Practitioners working in this highly specialist year group need continuing support to develop, share and embed effective practice that strengthens the quality of teaching and learning and its impact on good outcomes for children. The aim of the review is to get a true sense of how effective YR practice works and identify the challenges, tensions and confusions that prevent this from happening.’

2. Purpose of The Hundred Review

2.1. The explicit aims of The Hundred Review were to draw upon specific YR expertise and knowledge to establish an authoritative and comprehensive picture of current YR practice and provision and to identify and then explore the issues, tensions and confusions that currently exist. As a wide ranging review that would draw from a series of evidence strands, (See 3.1) its aim was to provide a clear and detailed picture that could and should inform a broader discussion of the issues involved.

2.2. The Hundred Review sought to answer three specific questions:

2.2.1. How are good outcomes secured in YR?

2.2.2. What is effective teaching in YR and how do we know?

2.2.3. What prevents or secures progress and attainment in YR?

3. Evidence strands

3.1. The evidence that informed the findings of The Hundred Review was drawn from the following sources:

3.1.1. An online survey (Appendix 11.5), active from 23/01/17 to 24/02/17, which consisted of 69 questions, requiring both quantitative and qualitative responses. There were a total of 4250 responses to the survey.

3.1.2. A series of national focus groups, held across England between 26/01/17 and 09/02/17, (Appendix 11.1) in which the following three questions formed the basis of discussion with participants:

- Do you believe that the EYFS framework is appropriate for all Reception aged children? If so why, and if not why not?
- What do you think is the purpose of the YR?
- What (if any) are the challenges of teaching in YR?

3.1.3. A total number of 44 Schools with one or more Reception classes were visited by members of the Early Excellence Curriculum Team between 12/01/17 and 01/03/17 (Appendix 11.3). These visits consisted of:

- An interview with the Headteacher/Senior Leader
- A tour of YR provision
- Interview(s) with YR Practitioner(s)

3.1.4. A review of academic and research material (Appendix 10), designed to:

- Explore and critique the concepts of school readiness and schoolification
- Evaluate research evidence about current YR practice, provision and outcomes
- Evaluate national and international evidence (from current neuro-scientific, child development and pedagogic research) that identifies those pedagogical approaches which secure the best outcomes for children of Reception age
- Identify the most appropriate long term learning outcomes for children of Reception age
- Set out broad conclusions from the research review on the most significant evidence for appropriate outcomes and effective pedagogical approaches in YR

(1) Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) (2016) The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2015/16, London: Ofsted

(2) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maintained-schools-and-academies-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-december-2016/maintained-schools-and-academies-inspection-outcomes-as-at-31-december-2016>

(3) "Definition: Good level of development Children achieving a good level of development are those achieving at least the expected level within the following areas of learning: communication and language; physical development; and personal, social and emotional development; literacy; and mathematics." (Appendix 6)

Section 1

1. What is the purpose of YR?

1.1. YR is located within Schools as, usually, the first year that the child attends full time. Some Schools have a Nursery Unit or class within the school and children may begin to attend earlier. Statutory legislation sets out the starting age of compulsory schooling as being ‘the term after the child’s 5th birthday’. This means that YR generally includes children with a range of ages; some of statutory school age and some who are not. Increasingly children tend to start in YR during the Autumn term intake of the academic year in which they will have their 5th birthday.

1.2. As the naming of this year suggests, YR has historically been viewed as the ‘receiving’ of the child into the school and as marking the beginning of their school ‘career’. As a result, this has often influenced the perception of its purpose within the wider educational framework and cultural expectations. Since the incorporation of YR into an explicitly ‘Early Years’ framework with its own curriculum, specific and individual outcomes, regulations and inspection framework, the ‘purpose’ of this Reception year has increasingly been scrutinised, debated and contested.

1.3. It could be argued that there is a clearly defined and unambiguous ‘purpose’ to YR which manifests itself in the expected attainment of a ‘Good Level of Development’ (GLD) as measured by the EYFS Profile. The EYFS Profile is the statutory instrument of assessment and accountability for children at the end of YR (Appendix 5). It consists of an assessed outcome for individual children of ‘emerging’, ‘expected’ or ‘exceeding’ in the EYFS Profile Learning and Development Areas of; Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED), Communication and Language, Physical Development, Literacy and Mathematics. However, there has always been an understanding that as the general point of entry and of ‘being received’ into the expectations, environment and potential of school, the purpose of this year is wider and more complex. The recent use of the term ‘school readiness’ has intensified the discussion around this school year and the nature of what ‘outcomes’ and ‘purpose’ define a ‘school ready’ child at the end of YR.

1.4. During The Hundred Review, discussion of the purpose of YR formed a central theme that defined and informed other aspects of pedagogy and provision, amid a general agreement that the notion of ‘outcomes’ defines the purpose of YR. The most vigorous discussion surrounded the nature, ‘pitch’, description and definition of what these ‘outcomes’ should be.

1.5. The commissioned review of the most recent academic and research material (Appendix 10) explored three main aspects which related to the ‘purpose’ and ‘perceived purpose’ of YR:

1.5.1. The term school readiness has been a central phrase within national Early Years policy for a number of years, especially since the most recent wholesale review of the EYFS, and as such could be defined as an explicit strategic outcome for YR. However, understanding of the term amongst both the EYFS and school communities is confused and there does not exist an agreed definition of what this means in practice for an individual child: “...there is no agreement upon a definition of the term ‘school readiness’ or ‘readiness for school’ and its use, because there is no agreement upon what young children should be prepared for; in essence, the disagreement about terminology and definition encapsulates a fundamental difference in conception of the purpose of EY education.” (Whitebread and Bingham, 2014, p.1; quoted in Appendix 10 p.7)

1.5.2. Aligned to this is the critique of what is described as ‘schoolification’ of early childhood education, a global trend that is evident in the English system. Cited as the result of an economic pressure as distinct from a purely educational one, Ang (2014 quoted in Appendix 10 p.8) argues that “when early education is framed within an economic paradigm it risks being reduced to simply being a stage of preparation for school and educational attainment.” It is stated that the EYFS has ‘evolved’ over recent years to be more about this process of ‘schoolification’ and a stronger emphasis on specific academic attainment and should be ‘realigned’ “...and to advocate for EY education to be in the best interest of children’s well-being and development.” (Appendix 10 p.8)

1.5.3. This commissioned review (Appendix 10) also explored the findings of longitudinal studies that identified the significant outcomes for children of YR age that impacted on their long term attainment. Central to this, and especially in relation to aspirations to reduce inequality and tackle disadvantage, was the importance of what are defined as ‘character traits’ or ‘soft skills’ as distinct from, but in addition to, more ‘academic’ skills. “As Heckman (2011) emphasises any early education programme seeking to reduce social inequalities between children must focus on the crucial role of skill formation, but this requires more than basic intellectual skills. Heckman identifies the equal importance of life skills such as conscientiousness, perseverance, motivation, sociability, attention, self-regulation and anger management, self-esteem, and the ability to defer gratification. He also notes that the critical period for the formation of such skills is within the pre-school years.” (Appendix 10 p.23)

These longitudinal studies also identified the specific aspects of the learning and development of children in YR that were associated with later long term attainment. These were:

- 1.5.3.1.** Language and Communication Skills
- 1.5.3.2.** Social and Emotional Skills
- 1.5.3.3.** Executive Functioning⁽¹⁾
- 1.5.3.4.** Physical Development

1.6. The need for a child to possess basic skills and knowledge was agreed by participants in The Hundred Review to be an element of the ‘purpose’ of YR. However, opinions differed amongst participants with regard to the ‘pitch’ and ‘level’ of expectations in relation to these basic skills and knowledge, and an awareness that the outcome at the end of YR would be dependent upon the child’s starting point. Participants agreed that an individual child's starting point, on entry to YR, could vary within a very wide spectrum depending on their range of experiences, the quality of their pre-YR experience and their particular level of development within the typical range for a child of that age.

1.7. Often these ‘basic skills and knowledge’ were identified by participants in the review in terms of aspects of the Specific Areas of Learning and Development as described in the EYFS Statutory Framework. There was broad agreement that these provided identifiable areas of skills and knowledge that make an important contribution towards defining the purpose of YR. In survey responses to questions relating to the assessment of and accountability for outcomes, 68% and 70% of respondents respectively indicated the importance and appropriateness of the Specific Areas of Learning and Development.

1.8. In addition to the Specific Areas of Learning and Development, participants identified the importance of phonetic knowledge and phoneme/grapheme correspondence as significant knowledge for YR children, with a widespread belief that these should be an additional, specifically assessed aspect of learning and development in YR.

1.9. Equally, the specific knowledge and skills associated with early mathematical understanding, such as the conservation of number and knowledge of numerals are considered to be important components of the ‘basic skills and knowledge’ that should form part of the defining outcomes in YR and hence are key elements of the purpose of that year.

1.10. The Areas of Learning and Development that constitute the ‘Prime’ Areas (Appendix 2) within the EYFS Statutory Framework are also considered by participants in The Hundred Review to be crucial aspects of YR in their own right. Over 90% of respondents to the online survey indicated that these are critical areas for both assessment and accountability. The pitch at the end of YR expectations for these, as set out in the EYFS Profile, is considered to be broadly appropriate.

1.11. Within the Prime Areas, elements of PSED, such as the ability to develop positive relationships, have high self-esteem and confidence, and be able to co-operate with other children, are believed to be necessary attributes for successful development. A key part of the role of the YR Practitioner, identified in the survey, is to ensure that children are supported in order to develop these attributes.

1.12. The development of children’s skills of Language and Communication are also functions of YR, with both Practitioners and School Leaders indicating that these need to be core foci of provision and should permeate all other aspects of learning and teaching.

1.13. Physical Development was also identified as a key area for YR children, underpinning effective learning and requiring on-going assessment, support and challenge to ensure that children developed appropriately and progressed towards effective outcomes.

1.14. The importance of learning behaviours as described within the EYFS Statutory Framework as the 'Characteristics of Effective Learning' (CoEL) (Appendix 4) also provided a focus for the outcomes in YR identified in the evidence gathered for The Hundred Review. In the online survey, 77.7% of respondents indicated that they thought that a child's learning behaviour should form a significant aspect of both assessment and accountability in YR and be specifically recognised as important YR outcomes for every child. The need for children to be motivated, persistent, curious about the world, tenacious, resilient and confident to explore their own interests were often cited as key purposes that YR should aim to achieve for all children. "Children should learn to be confident, independent learners. They should learn to play co-operatively with their peers, they should learn how to explore and become critical thinkers." (YR Teacher).

1.15. Aligned to this emphasis on children's characteristics of learning is a slightly less tangible, but nevertheless important aspiration amongst respondents that YR should continue to support the principles of lifelong learning; a 'love of learning' that should permeate and consolidate knowledge and skills in all areas of the EYFS Statutory Framework. YR Practitioners and Headteachers recognised this as a critical overarching intention within which all aspects of learning and teaching, whether academic or relating to behaviours and attitudes, should take place. Alongside the principle of being a lifelong learner, and as a means of describing, assessing, measuring and being accountable for this as a key purpose of YR, a significant proportion of participants in the review cited the importance of using the Leuven Scales for Well-being and Involvement (Appendix 8).

1.16. Both the focus groups and the online survey noted that the child's induction into the life of the school; its expectations, routines and culture, were seen as part of the purpose of YR. This might also chime with the search for an agreed definition of 'school readiness' in that it describes the material experiences which enable children to understand and interact with the requirements of being in school.

1.17. An additional significant purpose of YR is identified by some participants as the opportunity for Practitioners and other school staff to establish and nurture effective and meaningful relationships and channels of communication with children's parents and carers. Given the critical impact that this can have on children's attainment and achievement throughout their school careers, it was often noted by participants that, as the first point of contact for many parents and carers, YR could serve the invaluable purpose of setting the expectations and demonstrating the benefits of positive school/parent partnerships.

1.18. Given that the term 'school readiness' is both contested and controversial, it could be argued that the summary of all of these 'non tangible' aspects could constitute the definition of 'school readiness' and 'life readiness' both of which are seen to be clear purposes of YR. This key perception was summed up by one YR Teacher: "We believe that children should develop a love of learning through exploration and play; that through this they will become communicators, friends, and inquisitive learners who ask questions and know how to find out more."

2. Section summary

- Research indicates that there are key outcomes in YR that identify the likelihood of children's long term success.
- There is debate about the meaning, use and usefulness of terms such as 'school readiness' and 'schoolification'.
- There is a strong commitment from YR Practitioners, Teachers and School Leaders to ensuring that YR supports children to successfully acquire basic skills as represented by the Prime Areas of Learning and Development, Literacy and Maths (EYFS Framework).
- Survey evidence demonstrated an emphasis on the importance of children's learning behaviours as represented by the CoEL (EYFS Framework).
- There is a strong belief amongst YR Practitioners, Teachers and School Leaders that an important part of the purpose of YR should be to engender young children's love of learning.
- A key element of the purpose of YR is to induct children into the culture of school and for the school to form effective relationships with children's parents/carers.

Section 2 – What does Teaching and Learning Look Like in YR?

1. Introduction

1.1. Part of the core aspect of The Hundred Review was to focus on what constitutes good outcomes for children of this age and identify the most effective means of enabling this to happen. This required the evidence to be analysed in terms of the ‘content’ and ‘process’ of learning and teaching in YR.

2. Curriculum content in YR

2.1. Whilst 58% of participants in The Hundred Review survey believe that in YR, all seven Areas of Learning and Development set out in the EYFS Statutory Framework are of equal importance, 84% of respondents do not believe that these areas are presently given equal coverage in classroom practice. Over 90% of respondents stated that Literacy and Mathematics are given greatest prominence within the YR curriculum (Literacy 95%, Maths 91%). This view was endorsed by a number of Teachers and Practitioners participating in The Hundred Review focus groups; “there is an over focus on Literacy and Maths.”

2.2. Of the survey participants, 42% believe that the seven Areas of Learning and Development should not have equal status within the YR curriculum. Of these participants, there was widespread agreement that the three prime areas of learning PSED (97%); Communication and Language (97%); Physical Development (81%) were the most important and should be given greater status and prominence.

2.3. Evidence gathered from interviews with YR Teachers and Practitioners during school visits also revealed a commitment to the Prime Areas of Learning and Development; “I feel the particular focus on Communication and Language is exactly what our children need,” and; “Prime Areas as key developmental aspects need to be focused on first.” Another Practitioner reflected on the place of the Prime Areas within their practice; “As a group we noticed we had concentrated on the Prime Areas of Learning – this is key. We felt their main purpose was to promote a love of life-long learning and developing independent, resilient learners. Reception is the time to develop language and social skills.”

2.4. Further evidence of the perceived importance of the Prime Areas of Learning and Development can be found in the recent Study of Early Education and Development (SEED). This study is identified as significant by the commissioned review of published academic studies and current research (Appendix 10). Researchers for the SEED project have identified those aspects of practice that have the most positive impact on outcomes for children. An ‘emphasis on the Prime Areas of Learning’ was identified as one of the four areas promoting effective pedagogic practice. The most effective settings ensured staff were “modelling pro-social behaviour; small group activities supported children to work together, share and take turns,” there was “a consistent approach to behaviour management and using snacks and mealtimes as an opportunity to foster pro-social behaviour.” (Appendix 10 p.16) The development of communication and language was also explored within the SEED project. The most effective practice demonstrated a “language rich environment through the use of songs, nursery rhymes, stories and providing time for adult/child and peer-to-peer interaction.” (Appendix 10 p.16)

2.5. Those participants in The Hundred Review who placed greater emphasis on the Prime Areas of Learning within the YR curriculum considered that development of the skills associated with pro-social behaviour, communication and language were of paramount importance to children's learning.

2.6. In all the Schools visited as part of the Review children in YR classes participated in regular phonics and maths sessions. Many classes also had separate literacy inputs, which might include handwriting, reading (guided and individual) and targeted interventions.

2.7. When planning for implementation of the curriculum in YR, a majority of participants (94%) stated that planning and expectations are differentiated in relation to the child's age and/or stage of development. A significant number of participants (34%) stated that the current planning format used was not reflective of their classroom practice.

2.8. The SEED project (Appendix 10 6.2 p.15) found that the most effective approaches to curriculum planning ensured an approach which was;

- Child-centred
- Flexible and responsive to children's needs
- Informed by on-going assessment
- Grounded on the EYFS Statutory Framework
- Differentiated for age and stage of development, and which capitalised on children's interests in order to achieve learning outcomes

3. The approach to learning and teaching in the YR

3.1. Amongst the Headteachers and Senior Leaders participating in The Hundred Review, there was some concern around the difficulty in achieving a successful balance between child-initiated and adult-directed activities in YR. One Headteacher stated that; "Getting the balance between child-initiated learning and adult-directed learning is a challenge." A second response also illustrates this tension; "it can be tricky to get the balance between child-initiated learning and adult-directed." This tension was further expressed by another School Leader, concerned that they were; "not able to always follow children's interests."

3.2. Survey responses show that 93% of participants plan either for mostly child-initiated experiences or a mixture of adult-directed and child-initiated activities. Around half of participants (48%) stated that if they could choose how to plan for the balance between child-initiated and adult-directed activities that they would keep the same ratio as at present, whilst 49% of participants stated that they would like to be able to plan for more child-initiated experiences; only 1% of participants said they would like to plan for more adult-directed activities in YR.

3.3. School visits undertaken within the Review show that the vast majority of children in YR are being taught in classes where there are opportunities for child-initiated exploration alongside adult-directed sessions with a specific curriculum focus.

- 3.4.** Survey responses show that YR Teachers and Practitioners place great importance on the indoor learning environment, with 99%, considering the indoor learning environment and resources to be important in implementing effective YR practice and securing good outcomes for children. Evidence from school visits demonstrated that an integral part of the indoor learning environment was the creation of Continuous Provision; all Schools visited had well-established continuous provision, with access to the different areas considered to be central to effective practice within YR.
- 3.5.** The outdoor learning environment was also considered by Review participants to be central to implementing effective practice and securing good outcomes for children in YR. Of survey respondents, 98% stated a belief in its importance to successful learning and teaching in YR. This was confirmed during school visits undertaken for the Review. Every school visited had outdoor provision with children having daily access to an outdoor learning environment.
- 3.6.** This strong commitment to Continuous Provision and outdoor learning demonstrates their importance amongst Teachers, Practitioners, Headteachers and Senior Leaders, to learning and teaching in YR. The survey explored further the way that children learn most effectively; 78% of participants stated that accessing Continuous Provision was very important; 81% responded that child-initiated activities, both with and without adult support, were very important to effective learning in Reception. Opportunities for children to interact with their peers was also considered very important (84%).
- 3.7.** Evidence from the Review's focus group discussions and visits to Schools demonstrated that YR Teachers and Practitioners have a strong commitment to widening children's range of experiences as an important aspect of effective practice and good outcomes. Importance was attached to children trying new experiences, having new cultural opportunities and widening their life experience during their time in YR.
- 3.8.** Providing opportunities for children to follow their own interests was also viewed as a highly effective strategy to promote learning and development (83% of participants). Strategies that participants deemed to be less effective in this regard included worksheets (0.28%), rote learning (1.53%), and whole school commercial or 'in house' developed schemes (0.89%).
- 3.9.** The Review found that an understanding of the importance and impact of the adult's role is considered pivotal in providing the most effective YR practice. As one Headteacher stated; "Effective adult interactions and highly skilled adults supporting child-initiated learning allow you to extend and challenge children and ensure differentiation to meet individual needs."
- 3.10.** The view of the majority of Review participants is that adult-directed, whole class sessions are an ineffective approach to effective teaching and learning in YR, with only 7% stating that this was an effective approach. This outcome prompts questions regarding wider understanding of the roles and relationships between direct teaching, adult-supported learning and child-initiated learning in terms of their contribution to successful outcomes for children in YR.

4. Section summary

- There is a commitment amongst YR Practitioners and Schools Leaders to ensuring that the Prime Areas of Learning and Development are given appropriate status within YR classes. This is echoed in current research which identifies this as critical to children’s learning, development and long term outcomes.
- All YR classes within the Review provide focused Mathematics, Literacy and Phonics sessions as part of the daily routine.
- YR Practitioners deliver the EYFS Statutory Framework requirements through a mix of child-initiated and adult-directed approaches and differentiate these for children’s level of development. There are concerns that achieving an effective balance between these approaches can be a challenge and this can at times impact detrimentally on effectiveness and outcomes.
- The quality and nature of indoor and outdoor learning environments are seen as central to effective practice and good outcomes in Reception as these provide the breadth of opportunity necessary to ensure that all aspects of the statutory EYFS are addressed appropriately.
- The great majority of Schools visited had established Continuous Provision, accessed by children on a daily basis, thereby providing opportunities for establishing a balance between child-initiated and adult-directed activities. Although the use of Continuous Provision effectively supported child-initiated learning across all Schools visited, there was less evidence of it being used effectively for adult-supported and adult-directed learning.
- Alongside Continuous Provision, the majority of Schools visited had a range of activities set-up for children to do independently, often focused on Literacy and Mathematics. This appears to be indicative of one of the confusions regarding effective YR practice; the relationship between different kinds of teaching approaches.
- The Review found widespread agreement that an understanding of the importance and impact of the adult’s role is pivotal in providing the most effective YR practice, although there are differing views regarding the critical elements of this role and how it creates an appropriate and optimum impact on learning and development.

Section 3

1. What do assessment and accountability look like in YR?

- 1.1.** Evidence collected for the Review shows that currently, YR Teachers and Practitioners assess children's development, achievement and attainment using the Prime (Appendix 2) and Specific (Appendix 3) Areas of Learning and Development as set out in the EYFS Statutory Framework (Appendix 1). Although this Framework also requires Practitioners to assess using the CoEL (appendix 4), it was notable, and of some concern, that the survey indicated that 17.4% of respondents to the survey did not currently include these in the aspects of children's learning and development that they assessed.
- 1.2.** Alongside the assessment requirements set out in the EYFS Statutory Framework, 84% of respondents stated that they used additional assessments of children's phonic knowledge, 59.7% used additional assessments of children's key word knowledge in reading and 43.5% assessed children's key word knowledge in writing. 37% of survey respondents stated that they used the Leuven Scales for Well-being and Involvement (Appendix 8) as part of their ongoing assessment.
- 1.3.** In relation to questions about what should be assessed in YR the great majority of respondents supported the use of the Prime Areas of Learning (92.8%) and the CoEL (77.8%). A smaller majority (68.2%) supported the inclusion of the Specific Areas of Learning in the statutory assessment. Considerably fewer respondents believed that children's phonic knowledge should be part of ongoing assessment (47.7%) with smaller numbers supporting the use of key word knowledge in reading (20.9%) and in writing (13.9%). A much greater percentage of respondents (67.9%) believed that the Leuven Scales for Well-being and Involvement should be included in on-going assessment.
- 1.4.** The Hundred Review found that the process of assessment currently in use in YR classes is predominantly focused around the use of observation (97.2%) and information gleaned through interaction and questioning (91.4%), with some respondents indicating the use of tick lists of skills and knowledge (55.3%). Considerable minorities of respondents also used a whole class task based system (13.9%) and a whole class electronic test system (11.3%).
- 1.5.** The approaches to assessment currently in use in YR classes broadly reflect what is believed to be effective and appropriate, with observational and interaction/questioning approaches receiving respondent support of 98.2% and 92.7% respectively. There was less agreement between current practice and what respondents believe to be effective and appropriate in relation to the use of tick lists to record knowledge and skills, with only 22.1% believing that this was an appropriate approach to assessment in YR. The use of task based test systems and electronic based test systems were considered to be significantly less effective and appropriate with the support of 2.2% and 2% of respondents respectively.
- 1.6.** The commissioned review of the most recent academic and research material (Appendix 10) identified the approach to assessment as an area of practice that was being increasingly 'schoolified' (Appendix 10, 4.2 p.7).

- 1.7. The commissioned review also cited the need for ‘...a more holistic approach to assessment and the curriculum with a renewed focus on the affective domains of children’s learning’; and secondly, ...professionals (were urged) to reclaim their autonomy by ‘exploring differentiated and innovative approaches to assessment and the curriculum’ (Appendix 10 p.8).
- 1.8. The importance of recording and documenting children’s learning and development was a universal theme amongst all respondents, 99.1% of whom indicated that this formed a significant aspect of their approach to representing their assessments. There was also a broad agreement amongst respondents on the purpose of this activity, with 70.2% indicating that this was an equal balance between informing their practice and demonstrating progress.
- 1.9. The Hundred Review asked respondents to consider the issue of ‘accountability’; explicitly defined as ‘the aspects of children’s learning and development that are considered to be important and are, or need to be, used to demonstrate the effectiveness of provision’. Survey results correlated strongly with those relating to both current practice and respondent beliefs around the theme of assessment. The current approach to accountability, defined as attainment of GLD through the EYFS Statutory Framework, recognises the importance of Prime and Specific Areas of Learning and the CoEL. Respondents indicated that these aspects of learning and development formed the core of current measures of accountability, being used by 95.8%, 95.4% and 68.1% respectively. Respondents also reported significant use of children’s phonic knowledge for accountability (77.4%), knowledge of key words for reading (50.5%), and key words for writing (41.5%). A lower percentage of respondents (19.4%) were currently using the Leuven Scales for Well-being and Involvement as a means of accountability within YR.
- 1.10. Current practices regarding accountability were broadly similar to what respondents believed to be an appropriate approach, especially with regard to the use of the Prime Areas of Learning and Development (supported by 95.8% of respondents). Slightly fewer (71.4%) considered the use of the Prime areas of Learning and Development to be appropriate, while the use of the CoEL was considered by 68.1% of respondents to be an appropriate measure of accountability in YR. Whilst 40.6% of respondents believed that it was important to use children’s phonic knowledge for accountability purposes, there was less support for the use of key word knowledge in reading and in writing (15.2% and 10.9% respectively) for this purpose. Use of the Leuven Scales for Well-being and Involvement as an appropriate measure for YR accountability was supported by 50.7% of respondents.

1.11. The commissioned review (Appendix 10) outlined concerns expressed by one study regarding the process of ‘datafication’ (Appendix 10 p.12) and how this impacted negatively on YR practice. In what is described as a ‘disturbing picture’ among the 20 schools visited during this study, in order to meet the requirements of accountability; “Teachers were however not only under pressure to produce data, but, what they perceived as, correct data. To be able to produce correct data, the research revealed that some schools adopted a process where children are systematically sorted into three groups: a group of children who are expected to achieve and who are left to get on with it; a group of children who are expected to achieve with careful interventions; and a group of children ‘doomed to fail’ and who are therefore ignored.” (Appendix 10 p.12). It should be noted that such an unethical and irresponsible approach is not supported anywhere within existing statutory documentation which emphasises the need for all children to succeed and to be supported appropriately in order that they may do so.

1.12. The Hundred Review asked survey respondents to consider their approach to demonstrating the progress and development that children make in YR. Current practice demonstrates an overwhelming commitment (83.3%) to the ‘qualitative’ aspects of documentation provided by ‘Learning Journals’ and the use of photographs, video clips, written observations and short notes of incidents and learning episodes.

1.13. In terms of approaches to ‘calculating progress’ within YR the non-statutory Development Matters age band structure forms the most commonly used approach. Almost half of all respondents (47.2%) use an EYFS-specific commercial system to record and codify this, while others (29.1%) work within a whole school tracking system and 35.2% use their own ‘in house’ system.

1.14. There was broad support amongst survey respondents for retaining the EYFS Profile as the summative statutory assessment at the end of YR; 77.6% indicated that the status quo should remain with continued support for moderation and exemplification to ensure consistency. There was a strong similarity in levels of response to the retention of the EYFS Profile from YR Practitioners and Strategic Leaders/Headteachers (77% and 74% respectively in favour).

1.15. GLD is the statutory outcome derived from aspects of the EYFS Profile, used as a benchmark for appropriate attainment at the end of YR. This measure consists of the outcomes from children’s attainment in the EYFS defined areas of PSED, Communication and Language, Physical Development, Literacy and Mathematics. A total of 32% of respondents believed that this is an effective or very effective measure of outcomes, with strong similarity of responses between Headteachers and YR Practitioners. 23% of all respondents considered the current GLD measure as not effective, whilst 44% believed that it was an effective measure but only provided a partial picture and should be extended to increase its effectiveness. The ‘partial’ picture identified by these respondents referred to the absence of the CoEL from the measure, the predominance of Literacy and Mathematics, and the exclusion of the Specific Areas of Learning and Development. There was also concern that, while the GLD indicated a level of attainment reached by the child at the end of YR, it did not take into account their starting point and therefore the did not represent the level of achievement that had been accomplished across the year.

1.16. The introduction of a statutory 'Baseline Assessment' to provide a 'starting point' from which to measure cohort progress through Primary Schools was introduced in 2015 and is to be reviewed as part of Consultation for Primary School Assessment (2017)⁽¹⁾ The use of a statutory Baseline Assessment for this purpose in YR was supported by 36.6% of all respondents, with broad agreement in the proportions of YR Teachers and Practitioners and School Leaders/Headteachers as to the desirability, or not, of such a measure.

2. Section summary

- YR Practitioners assess the aspects of children's learning and development as required by the EYFS Statutory Framework, although not all assess the CoEL.
- Additional aspects also assessed included phonics, knowledge of key words (in both reading and writing) and the Leuven Scales for Well-being and Involvement.
- A large number of participants believe that the Leuven Scales for Well-being and Involvement should be an integral part of the assessment and accountability system for YR.
- The vast majority of Practitioners use observational assessment to gather information about children and believe that this is how effective assessment should take place.
- There was a broad consensus amongst all participants in The Hundred Review on the purpose of assessment as both a support for learning and teaching and in order to demonstrate children's progress.
- Most respondents believed that the EYFS Profile should be retained as a statutory assessment at the end of YR, although many felt it should include other aspects of learning and development such as CoEL.
- Just over a third of respondents supported the continued use of a Baseline Assessment.

(1) <https://consult.education.gov.uk/assessment-policy-and-development/primary-assessment/>

Section 4

1. How do children's different starting points impact on YR?

1.1. At the beginning of YR children are at a wide range of points in terms of their development and learning, sometimes (but by no means always) reflecting a variation in age. The different starting points of children as they begin YR raises several issues and concerns for Headteachers, Senior Leaders, Reception Teachers and Practitioners, in particular for those children who start school with a level of learning and development below what is considered 'expected' for their chronological age. In the words of one YR Teacher; "in our school social circumstances and environmental factors mean a very low baseline." The Hundred Review participants demonstrated a shared concern that, for children coming into school below or well below this 'expected level', it was more difficult to reach the levels of attainment required by the end of YR (GLD). One YR Teacher stated "our children come into Reception below expectations so there is a lot to do to ensure they are at 'expected' by the end of Reception." This range of starting points is leading, as one participant stated, to "a huge spectrum of needs and expectation."

1.2. Review participants shared different ways in which children were entering YR at starting points below the expected level for their chronological age. One Headteacher stated that "speech and language is a huge issue for us", whilst a YR Teacher discussed this in relation to their school; "in our community it is PSED and Communication and Language that are particularly low on entry." Physical development was also discussed within the Review; "they should have lots of opportunities to develop their fine and gross motor skills as increasingly children are coming in with poorer skills." As these representative comments show, the greatest concern about children's starting points was expressed in relation to the Prime Areas of Learning and Development.

1.3. Review participants also believed that a child's age affected their starting point as they entered YR. They expressed concern that summer born children were starting school at a very young age but were assessed on entry against the same criteria as children almost a year older. As one Headteacher stated; "we can't expect the same of all children because they are at a certain milestone - we need to take account of age". A second Headteacher shared; "reaching expectations at the end of EYFS for summer born children can prove challenging". A YR Practitioner thought that summer born children were being disadvantaged within the EYFS; "for the majority it works... for summer born children it doesn't."

1.4. Participants in the Review shared the belief that for children who started the year below the expected level of learning or development – either for reasons of age or prior life experience, YR could feel like a race to an externally determined end point which does not recognise the breadth of actual starting points. One Headteacher expressed the view that; “children are coming into school lower year on year and the expectations are getting higher. Children are not having the opportunity to underpin their learning first and we are in too much of a rush to get coverage.” A second Headteacher also expressed a concern that there is a “risk of rushing – there needs to be a strong focus on children’s first step of learning.”

There was also a concern that the concept of “readiness to learn” could be an issue for children who had low starting points of learning and development on entry to Reception. This concern is explored in detail by the commissioned review of research (Appendix 10). Drawing on the work of Bernstein (2000), Neaum suggests that “to make education accessible to all children we need to question provision.” Ang’s paper points out “that an appropriate curriculum must be able to make allowances for diverse learners with varying abilities and backgrounds, for whom learning in a formal setting may be unfamiliar.”

Derbyshire et al suggest that schools should be “sensitive to life experiences outside school and offer broader developmental experiences.” This is specifically recognised by a number of Review participants who have seen a real need for children in YR classes to engage in first hand activities that will broaden life experiences.

1.5. In response to the issues raised above one review participant thought that the best way to support all children as they begin YR was through “being confident and supported in meeting the needs of children as a priority; identifying starting points and working from these.”

2. Section summary

- Children entering YR with a low starting point in their learning and development, and those that have a summer birthdate, can often find it challenging to attain a GLD by the end of YR, even when there is specific and targeted support in place. There is a strong belief that this needs to be recognised in approaches to accountability and measuring progress and these need to acknowledge relative achievement alongside attainment.
- For children entering Reception with starting points below age-related expectations, the key areas of concern were often the Prime Areas of Learning and Development.
- Effective induction into the culture and ethos of YR, its expectation and routines, is critical in ensuring that children establish confidence and familiarity with the learning environment to support high quality learning and development. The development of familiarity and confidence should be prioritised within this initial induction period.

Section 5

1. How does YR support the diverse needs of children?

1.1. The Effective Preschool Primary and Secondary Education Project (EPPSE) found that one of the key indicators of high quality provision and practice was the way in which a setting/school responded to and promoted diversity; “the study found that quality practices related to diversity were associated with as many as 5 of the 9 cognitive and behavioural attainment outcomes, more than any other one factor, including Literacy. Low attainment was associated with diversity in ethnic background, language, gender, special needs and socio-economic status (SES) at all levels of education.” In the settings and schools that were part of the EPPSE study; “diversity quality was a very strong predictive factor in terms of children’s cognitive outcomes. It was also associated with social and behavioural outcomes such as independence, co-operation and conformity.” (Appendix 10 p.15.)

1.2. When assessing a school’s diversity the EPPSE study included factors such as planning for individual learning needs, gender equity and awareness and race equality.” In her research paper (2014), Ang states that “an appropriate curriculum must be able to make allowances for diverse learners with varying abilities and backgrounds, for whom learning in a formal setting may be unfamiliar.” Ang ends her paper with a plea “to all adults who work for and with children to reflect on their practice and values and to advocate for Early Years education to be in the best interest of children’s well-being and development.” (Appendix 10 p.8)

1.3. Participants in The Hundred Review shared the belief that the EYFS is; “a crucial stage for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their parents because it establishes home learning partnerships, supports the early identification of learning needs and enables early interventions that will impact on the child and family in the future.” (YR Teacher) Participants endorsed the importance (where possible) of identifying additional needs before a child reaches YR; this early identification is more successful, it was stated, when there is good communication between settings and schools and where pre-school settings are able to identify needs and seek appropriate support.

1.4. Participants also shared the belief that the EYFS Statutory Framework was supportive of children in Reception who had additional needs. One Review participant shared; “the EYFS Framework and its focus on the characteristics allows us to deliver bespoke early intervention whenever it is needed.” The opportunity to plan for individual learning needs was crucial: one participant shared that the EYFS Statutory Framework enabled them to adopt “a flexible and adaptable approach so we can plan around whatever is happening for that child.” Another participant shared; “because the children who attend our school are often delayed in their development they need more focus on the Prime Areas of Learning and CoEL; our children need more active learning, play-based experiences.” Participants in the Review expressed their concern for those YR Practitioners who had restricted opportunities to implement personalised learning for children with additional needs; one example given was of a Reception Teacher “teaching phonics to children with delayed language skills.”

1.5. Delayed language development of children in YR was a concern voiced by a significant number of Review participants: “speech and language is a challenge for our children.” One participant who works with children with complex needs stated; “our children have had limited early experiences and limited opportunities for early interactions and relationships.” Concern around delayed language development was shared by Snowling et al (2011), commissioned by the DfE to review evidence on the link between language and communication and later attainment. One source of evidence was a population-based longitudinal study of parents and children in the UK (Roulstone et al. 2011). This showed that “children who enter school with poorly developed speech and language are at high risk of literacy difficulties” and that “educational underachievement is common in such children.” Roulstone's study identifies that the “core of language acquisition occurs between 1 – 4 years old (YR), with children acquiring much of the necessary phonology, syntax and vocabulary during this time.” The authors go on to state that the evidence seems to indicate that language and communication acquisition is shaped even before the child enters the Reception year and that effort to support language and communication development is needed much earlier, and throughout the Reception year, if long term attainment is to be realised.” Roulstone's research highlighted the importance of supporting the development of a child's communication and language skills in Reception; by doing so, children will be enabled to access the wider curriculum with greater success. (Appendix 10 p.24)

1.6. Review participants also expressed concerns that children were entering Reception with delayed personal, social and emotional skills. Goodman et al conducted a review for the DfE in 2015 looking at the “long term associations between social and emotional skills in childhood and adult outcomes.” The Hundred Review found that early social skills were important to; “mental health and well-being, health behaviours and partnerships in later life.” Emotional well-being was also seen to be a “powerful predictor of mental well-being.” As the commissioned review of current research summarises; “this evidence points strongly to the importance of social and emotional skills as key outcomes during YR.” (Appendix 10 page 2.4)

1.7. Participants described the importance for YR children who have more complex additional needs to have a “consistent and appropriate placement” to enable staff to “get to know each child as a ‘whole’ and plan provision to what they know about that child.” Consistency and stability ensure children “do so much better” because staff can “tailor the framework to each child.” Participants shared that children with more complex additional needs can be “misplaced or have no placement”; one child “had been in three different EYFS placements.” An absence of support for children with complex needs has been raised repeatedly during the Review as an issue; one Headteacher of a mainstream school shared their concerns regarding; “the complexity of some SEND children joining YR without specialist provision to support.” Other participants described “delay in getting support for children,” and “a lack of experts to support children with these additional needs.” The resulting situation in Reception could include children who are struggling to access provision, parents who are raising concerns because their child is not settling into the year and Practitioners who are feeling under-resourced and unable to meet the needs of all children in the class.

1.8. When the school readiness agenda is considered in relation to children who have additional needs, the work of Pretti-Frontczak et al. (2006 pp48-51, and referenced in the commissioned review of current research evidence, Appendix 10) promotes; “an understanding of readiness as a holistic concept where all stakeholders need to be ready; children, families and schools – where all involved are interconnected”. The authors' view on ‘getting children ready for school’ presents a positive, supportive model for children with additional needs including the following suggested strategies:

- “1. Conceptualising readiness as a relationship
2. Seeing the child as an integrated whole
3. Expecting and valuing differences” (Appendix 10 p.10)

Participants in The Hundred Review have demonstrated a real commitment to ensuring that children in Reception who have additional needs are valued, their strengths celebrated, their needs supported and a personal learning pathway provided. Evidence gathered from Review participants shows that every child is viewed holistically, with great importance placed on the Prime Areas of Learning and Development alongside the CoEL; characteristics that promote the development of positive and effective learning behaviours.

2. Section summary

- Support for children with additional needs/SEND is likely to be more effective when procedures are in place to identify specific needs prior to entry to YR. This early identification needs to be prioritised and fully supported by all EYFS settings that feed into YR classes.
- There was a consensus amongst Review respondents that the EYFS Statutory Framework provides a supportive and protective framework for children who have additional needs and who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). The flexibility of approach permitted within the EYFS Framework and its focus on the Prime Areas of Learning and Development and the CoEL enables Practitioners to support the development of children with a diverse range of characteristics and needs.
- In particular, an emphasis on the Prime Areas of PSED and Communication and Language was considered to be critical in ensuring inclusive and supportive provision in YR.
- In order to support effective provision and ensure good outcomes for children with SEND and EAL, stable Reception experience and immediate access to support were considered to be vital by both School Leaders and Practitioners.

Section 6

1. How is YR practice supported by the EYFS Statutory Framework?

1.1. The Hundred Review found that the principles of effective YR practice and the outcomes defined by it are considered to be well supported by the current EYFS Statutory Framework. Participants believed that the presence of this Framework provides Teachers and Practitioners with an appropriate and challenging curriculum and School Leaders and Headteachers with a suitable framework with which to review and monitor YR practice and outcomes.

1.2. The commissioned review of the most recent academic and research material (Appendix 10) cites Bradbury (2013) in which it was stated that the EYFS "...promote(s) rather a narrow view of what constitutes a good learner. ...by being so detailed, the 17 Early Learning Goals (ELGs) in the EYFSP promote a model of the 'ideal learner' that may disadvantage some children ...many of the values inherent in the ELGs, such as the expectation that children should be able to make rational choices and take individual responsibility for their learning, reflect a particular view of the child. ...(and) a restricted notion of the ideal learner may in effect systematically disadvantage some children, as assessment tools affect classroom practices." (Appendix 10 p.11). In addition the author's perception is that "...the EYFSP assessment shapes what is valued in the classroom through the way it positions the child as becoming a particular learner by prioritising rationality; enthusiasm; flexibility; industriousness; self-regulation; reflectivity; and self-promotion. YR is in many ways a unique year ...as a transition year, and while acknowledging that many of these are desirable traits for learners there is a genuine danger that by pursuing a narrowly focused agenda, the curriculum will be inaccessible to some children" (op cit p.11). In an additional comparative study in which Early Childhood curricula are compared, the EYFS Framework is critiqued as "...an example of a curriculum that views the child as a future pupil and citizen, an economic investment for the adult they will become." (op cit p.21).

1.3. Participants in The Hundred Review firmly believe that the EYFS Statutory Framework provides a structure that is 'holistic' in nature and therefore supports and accounts for all the interrelated aspects of a child's learning and development.

1.4. It was further noted by participants, that the flexible nature of the EYFS Statutory Framework enables Schools and Teachers to individualise the nature and level of, and their approach to, teaching and supporting children's learning. This was particularly the case where participants recognised the opportunity the Framework provides to truly meet the needs of children as individual learners.

1.5. Both Teachers and School Leaders believe that the EYFS Statutory Framework lies broadly within the definition of being 'developmentally appropriate'; coupled with the flexibility referred to above, it provides a suitable framework for learning and teaching in YR. In particular there was wide support amongst participants for the ELG outcomes in most of the specified Areas of Learning and Development.

1.6. In particular, the Prime Areas of Learning were believed to be especially important for children within YR and were consistently identified as the ‘three most important areas of learning’ in the YR, providing the appropriate foundations for engagement with all other current, and future learning. The outcomes for the Prime Areas of Learning and Development were also considered to be appropriately pitched for children in YR. Survey responses indicated agreement with the pitch of PSED by 95.9% of respondents, for Communication and Language 94.2% and for Physical Development 92.1%.

1.7. The CoEL were also identified by participants in The Hundred Review as a critical aspect of the EYFS Statutory Framework. These were considered important for their focus on children’s learning behaviours and the support for children ‘learning how to learn’, vital in securing good current and future outcomes in all areas of Learning and Development. The survey indicated that 85.7% of respondents believed that the CoEL should remain within the EYFS Statutory Framework requirements for YR.

1.8. There was a strong emphasis from both School Leaders and Practitioners that the EYFS Statutory Framework is instrumental in acknowledging the uniqueness of YR as that part of the EYFS which takes place within a school context. Its recognition of the importance of the specialist knowledge and understanding that is required of YR Teachers, the declared value of play-based learning and the provision of the flexibility required to meet the needs of individual children, were all considered vital in supporting effective YR practice and outcomes.

1.9. Within this largely supportive picture however, there was a degree of concern regarding some structural consequences of the EYFS Statutory Framework and the ways in which this potentially impacted on the effectiveness of YR practice. Although non-statutory, the Development Matters guidance that contains the age related statements for all areas of Learning and Development was felt to be too broad a document for some purposes. It was apparent that there exists an element of confusion regarding the status of Development Matters as statutory or non-statutory guidance, when it has always clearly been the latter. Concern was expressed by a number of School Leaders that some Teachers and Practitioners ‘clung’ to the Development Matters statements and were reluctant to describe children’s learning without them. Added to this was the belief that the lack of independent, external moderation and guidance as to how the Development Matters age band statements should be used, leads to an overall inconsistency, making any strategic use of the age bands problematic.

1.10. More serious and widespread concerns were expressed within The Hundred Review in relation to the ELG outcomes for Literacy – Writing and Mathematics – Number. Both these sets of ELG statements were felt to be pitched at a very high level for children of Reception age, with the result that this compromised and contradicted practice which was supportive of good outcomes. Survey results indicated that 40.3% of respondents considered the ELGs for Literacy were inappropriate, and 34.7% considered that this was true of the ELG expectations for Mathematics.

1.11. Across the whole of The Hundred Review there was widespread and overwhelming support for retaining YR within the EYFS Statutory Framework from Practitioners, Teachers, School Leaders and Headteachers. Survey results indicated that 98.3% of respondents believed that YR should stay as part of the EYFS, a sentiment that was equally strongly expressed during the school visits and focus groups.

2. Section summary

- The Hundred Review revealed unanimous support for retaining the EYFS Statutory Framework and ensuring that YR remains within it.
- It is believed that the EYFS Statutory Framework is an holistic and valid document that effectively supports learning and teaching in YR.
- There is strong support for the Prime Areas of Learning and the CoEL as the core elements of effective YR practice.
- The Hundred Review revealed confusion regarding the status and best use of the (non-statutory) Development Matters age band statements.
- There is concern about the pitch of the ELGs for Literacy and Mathematics; whether the statements are at an appropriate level for the end of YR, and whether an over focusing on formal skills and knowledge detracts from supporting wider aspects of learning and development that support good outcomes in these curriculum areas.

Section 7

1. What is the impact of leadership on YR?

1.1. The case studies included in the SEED project (Callanan, M 2016 referenced in Appendix 10) considered the impact of leadership on YR. The SEED study found that, in the most effective settings and schools “strong leadership was also considered vital, and good practice was underpinned by Leaders who led by example, fostered team work and had a clear vision of what they were aiming to achieve.” (Appendix 10 p.17) One Headteacher visited as part of The Hundred Review shared their view on the importance of leadership; “We need Schools with strong EYFS leadership ...a strong core so that Early Years drives practice... constantly reflecting... looking at and being critical of initiatives.”

1.2. One method of achieving strong leadership was the inclusion of the EYFS Lead onto the school Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Review participants believed that this gave the EYFS higher status and greater importance within the whole school: “EYFS should always be represented on SLT.” One EYFS Lead stated; “I work in a school where I am part of the SLT and Governing Body and feel my voice is heard, this is important.”

1.3. There was also a strongly held belief amongst Review participants that the knowledge, skills and advocacy of EYFS Leaders are vital to successful and effective YR practice and provision; partly for Teachers and Practitioners but also for Headteachers - whose perception, understanding and valuing of the EYFS is seen to be critical for its success. Practitioners described their EYFS Leads with terms such as “knowledgeable and confident.” Headteachers also referred to the expertise of their EYFS Leads and the impact this had on their own knowledge and understanding of the EYFS in general and YR in particular. One Headteacher stated “I have had in-depth discussions with my EYFS Lead and Teachers, which have in turn prompted me to reflect and consider my understanding. I have found their expertise illuminating and inspirational.” Participants state that their EYFS Leads bring YR teams together, providing significant support, some very practical in its nature; one participant stated that their EYFS Lead “is continually reflecting, reviewing and observing the practice. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is embedded and research is used to influence and inform practice.”

1.4. Participants working in YR considered the support of their school SLT as an important aspect of effective leadership of YR. One SLT was described as being “highly supportive and understanding – an experienced SLT who enable flexible and responsive interpretation of the EYFS.” Another YR Practitioner commented that the “SLT provides lots of opportunity for autonomy and is supportive of the approach and the principles of the EYFS.” Some Review participants stated that if an understanding of the EYFS was absent from SLTs, there may be an expectation that YR provision and practice be similar in organisation and teaching to KS1 and KS2 year groups, thereby eroding the unique nature of YR and moving its practice and provision away from the principles identified in the EYFS Statutory Framework, and the research evidence around effective YR practice and good outcomes for children.

1.5. The effective monitoring of teaching and learning in YR was viewed as an important aspect of leadership. The Hundred Review participants stated that such monitoring needed to take account of the specific nature of much of YR practice and provision. One participant shared that; “everyone tries to make Reception fit into the monitoring of the other year groups and we don’t.” Another participant considered that monitoring of YR should begin with observations of practice and provision, however their experience of those observing was that the criteria and models used were whole school based. Whilst these could be adaptable, such models were not always sensitive enough to the specific circumstances and unique nature of YR. The view from participants was that observation of YR practice and provision would provide Senior Leadership with the information required to answer questions and hypotheses about EYFS data.

1.6. A high number of participants working in YR commented on the critical importance of the Headteacher having a secure understanding of the principles and practice of YR. This was pivotal to YR receiving the support and resources needed to be highly effective. Headteachers who had taught/are teaching in the EYFS felt well equipped and confident to lead, monitor and constructively challenge practice and provision in YR. One Headteacher commented; “as an ex EYFS Practitioner I am very confident I can do this and as a Head I can also offer balance and find compromise. I support the team and I also understand challenges.” A second Headteacher stated; “I teach in Reception so have an in-depth knowledge of the day-to-day practicalities of working in the EYFS. I have a very thorough and all-encompassing interest in the research and theory that supports children’s early learning and development. This allows me to have a clear vision and belief in a child centred approach to learning.”

1.7. Amongst those Headteachers who did not have direct experience of teaching in YR, there was strong commitment towards gaining an understanding of effective Reception practice and provision. Comments from such Headteachers included; “I am not an EYFS specialist but keen to find out and upskill myself – ‘on a journey’.” A second Headteacher shared; “I have developed myself through reading, research, visiting other Schools and talking to colleagues in other schools.” Another Headteacher commented “I have made it my business to develop a good instinct and working knowledge of EYFS practice.” The Hundred Review has demonstrated that Practitioners and Headteachers alike hold the view that it is very important for the School Leader to have a secure understanding of child development and an up to date understanding of the most effective YR practice and provision. As one participant stated; “I do believe it should be compulsory for Headteachers to be kept up to date with EYFS, to understand how different we are to the rest of the school and why it is important that we stay that way.”

2. Section summary

- The presence of EYFS Leads on school SLT was seen as an important indication of the value placed on YR within a school, and necessary to ensure that the uniqueness and pressures on YR were reflected and addressed within whole school policies and procedures.
- There was a strong belief that SLT need to fully understand the nature and purpose of YR, the relevant statutory documentation and be confident and conversant with the principles by which YR operates.
- The need for Senior Leaders need to be fully informed in order to ensure that the monitoring of learning and teaching in YR is appropriate and challenging was identified as a key issue by YR Teachers and Practitioners.

Section 8 – How do Transitions Affect YR?

1. Transition into Reception

1.1. When considering transition into YR, Review participants agreed that this was an important process for children, their parents and YR staff. One participant shared that it was important to work with nursery classes and non-maintained pre-school providers to “foster a shared vision and effectively support the children to make a smooth transition.” Another participant stated that entering YR (and starting school life) could be a “life-changing experience” for children and their families, so planning for this process was important: “it’s vital to share all information to prepare and plan for an individual’s development. Well-being must be the highest priority in order for children to learn.”

1.2. Many participants shared the view that transition should not be seen as a stand-alone event but; “as an ongoing process and not a one-off event. Developing relationships amongst providers is key.” Another participant considered that “schools need to work through the year with feeder nurseries and playgroups and not just in the summer term to support good and effective transition.” Participants agreed that closer professional relationships amongst those working with children about to enter YR were vital to smooth transitions. One participant suggested that “local clusters should meet to be more aware of practice to aid transition.”

1.3. The SEED study (reference in Appendix 10) found that supporting transition is one of the features of effective pedagogic practice for children from 3 – 5 years old. In this study, when staff and parents were asked to identify features of good practice in relation to transition into school, these included; “effective information sharing with schools through transition reports, school visits to settings, and consulting parents on the information that was being shared. Taking children to visit their new school, and building on-going relationships with local schools.”

1.4. In relation to effective information sharing with schools, participants were asked if useful information was passed on to YR staff from pre-school providers. Responses show that there is a need to look closely at the information that is being sent from nurseries and pre-school providers. One participant stated that it would be useful if information on a child’s; “personality and interests were commented on more. A clearer focus on CoEL would aid transition.” There was also a view held by a number of participants that a standard transition document is needed to support the information sharing process: “it can be very difficult when children come to Reception from so many different places and there is no centralised requirement for transition documentation.” There was a widespread view that more guidance is needed regarding the information to be shared on a child's transition into YR.

1.5. To ensure greater consistency in the information which accompanies a child entering YR, there is considerable support amongst Review participants for greater emphasis on moderation process for assessment judgements made throughout the EYFS. Participants consider that programmes of moderation involving Nursery, non-maintained pre-school and YR staff would lead to more consistent judgements and a data set that could support YR staff to gain an accurate picture of the child as they left pre-YR provision. A moderation process would also support Reception staff who can be liaising with up to 30 different providers and who are assimilating data from large numbers of different Nursery and non-maintained pre-school settings. One review participant also thought that the transition process would be improved if Nursery and pre-school staff had “on-going training and support about what comes next and the experience of children as they start school.”

1.6. Review participants were concerned that effective transition was being curtailed by a lack of funding and insufficient time being given to Practitioners to support and develop the process. One participant voiced their thoughts that “a good range of transition events are highly effective and important. These are significantly time consuming and this needs to be taken into account when planning the year.” Another participant shared their concern that “school budget sometimes effects transition – no time/money to allow for home visits.”

Review participants felt that support from SLT was needed in order to ensure an effective transition process: “it is a two-way process and schools have a big responsibility. The SLT of the school need to value this transition and provide time for staff to facilitate effective practice.” When funding is allocated to transition, its impact is very apparent: “funding home-school visits and open mornings with parents and children had a really positive impact this year. It should be widely expected and supported.”

1.7. The identification and support of children who have additional needs was seen as a very important aspect of the transition process. Participants commented on how difficult transition can be if they are not aware of those children who may require specialised support and adapted provision, or may have a specific barrier to learning. As one participant reported; “children can come into Reception without additional needs identified so we have to start the process.” Review participants also held the view that a greater level of support during transition may be needed for children who have additional needs. One participant expressed this as a need for “extended transition for children with SEND.”

2. Transition from Reception to Key Stage One

2.1. When considering the move that children make from the end of YR into Key Stage One (KS1), participants identify a “need for time to ensure a smooth transition.” One participant felt that “higher priority should be given to transition and time given for YR and Y1 Teachers to plan and discuss transition appropriately”, whilst another identified a need for “transition meetings before the summer break,” with Y1 staff “given the opportunity to spend extended periods of time with the children rather than the one day transition usually offered.” There was also a suggestion that “Y1 teaching staff should visit Reception class and develop a relationship with the children prior to the children moving into Y1.” To ensure that transition is seen as high priority within a school, one participant suggested that “every school needs a transition lead teacher.”

2.2. In looking at the transition process from a child’s point of view Huff (2013, referenced in Appendix 10) found that it was beneficial for children who were moving into Y1 to do so alongside friends they had made in their YR class. Huff states that this “facilitates children’s agency of bringing in their own ideas and interests into the new classroom, even if the learning situations become more structured and prescriptive than they were before.” Children feel more secure and have more confidence to express their opinions and put their ideas forward within Y1 if they have the familiarity of working with children they have previously known.

2.3. In looking at the transition process from an educator’s point of view, participants were of the opinion that both YR and Y1 Practitioners needed an understanding of what was happening in each classroom: “Practitioners in YR need to have an understanding of what Y1 and beyond consists of.” Also; “Y1 Teachers should have all of the knowledge of an EYFS Teacher on how young children learn.” Another Review participant stated that staff should also work together to undertake “shared observations, monitoring and sharing – not just looking at books.”

2.4. The emphasis placed on understanding how children learn in the EYFS was widely seen as a critical omission from the KS1 curriculum. One participant stated that “CoEL need to be part of KS1 as they are part of life-long learning skills”. Another participant expressed the concern that “there isn’t any official recognition of the CoEL and no age-related expectations.” A further participant felt “they would like to see well-being and involvement being used into Y1 and beyond.” The Leuven scales for Well-being and Involvement (Appendix 8) are two sets of indicators that look at how intensely a child is engaged in a learning experience (involvement) and how at ease they are, how they are able to be spontaneous and are free of emotional tensions (well-being). As with the CoEL the Leuven scales consider how children are learning.

2.5. The different learning environment children may experience when they move into Y1 was explored by many participants. One stated that “transition into Y1 is poor at my school at present. Children are too formal too soon. There is no opportunity for children to access role play, outdoor learning or small world in Y1.” When asked if they believed that Y1 provision should resemble that in Reception at the beginning of the academic year, 97% of participants agreed. One Headteacher took this further; the principles should be extended into Y1 too, an extra year of this practice and provision would benefit outcomes.”

2.6. A concern for participants when considering the transition from Reception into KS1 was the lack of continuity between the two curricula. One participant describes this issue; “the KS1 curriculum does not seem to have built upon EYFS and this causes tensions.” When participants were asked whether they believed that the requirements of the National Curriculum built on the outcomes of the EYFS 79% responded that they did not. One participant discussed this point; “you can’t link the EYFS to the Y1 curriculum”. Another response identifies a gap between the EYFS and Y1 curricula; “the gap between the ELGs and the Y1 new National Curriculum is too wide. It sets schools up to fail pupils because they have to bridge that gap as well as reach the end of the Y1 outcomes.”

2.7. Participants expressed the belief that the content of the KS1 curriculum impacts on the approach to learning and teaching in Y1. One participant described this specifically; “children do not change much between YR and Y1, some are only just five, the system should recognise this. There is a big difference in curriculum and approaches to learning.”

2.8. Julie Fisher’s work (2011, referenced in Appendix 10) proposes that; “there is a need to re-think children’s educational experiences in English Early Years classrooms, because of the identified discontinuity between the play-based and child-initiated EYFS curriculum and the more structured adult-led primary curriculum.” (Appendix 10 p.21) Fisher is reporting the outcomes of an action research project in one local authority: “Teachers wanted to explore and develop what they termed ‘developmentally appropriate teaching’ (p.34) while still meeting government expectations.” Project conclusions suggested that the following changes would support a move towards more developmentally appropriate practice in Y1:

- 2.8.1.** Effective use of the indoor and outdoor environment
- 2.8.2.** Supporting the value of play
- 2.8.3.** Classroom organisation in whole-class versus small group teaching
- 2.8.4.** The value of non-participant observations
- 2.8.5.** Flexible planning
- 2.8.6.** Flexible timetabling

Teachers who were part of the action research project and who made the changes identified above; “reported a desire to continue teaching in this more play-based developmentally appropriate way.” (Appendix 10 p.22)

3. Section summary

- Transition into Reception
 - In order to establish an effective transition into YR, it was strongly believed that this was best viewed as a process that emphasised continuity rather than a single event.
 - Funding and non-contact time need to be made available for YR staff to effectively address the range of issues associated with transition to YR from previous provision.
 - Information provided for Reception staff needs to present an holistic picture of the individual child and it is important that assessments, or indications of a child's level of development, are consistent and accurate.
- Transition into Y1
 - Effective transition into Y1 was considered to be dependent on transparent and professional relationships between YR and Y1 staff, specifically in terms of pedagogical approaches.
 - Part of the disconnect between YR and Y1 was believed to be due to the different statutory curricula that apply to the adjacent age groups, and the perceived shift from an emphasis on process as well as content in YR to a greater emphasis on the latter in Y1.
 - It was widely believed that, due to the age of the children and their developmental phase, the continuation of aspects of EYFS pedagogy, in particular the use of the Prime Areas and CoEL, would benefit children as they transferred to Y1 and hence support improved outcomes in KS1.

Section 9

1. What are the external pressures on YR classes?

1.1. The EYFS is a statutory Framework (Appendix 1) which clearly defines expected outcomes for children in YR. The results of recent Ofsted Inspections and recent data from the EYFS Profile appear to indicate a national picture of increasing quality of provision and improved attainment (see Appendix 6). In addition, there is broad consensus on the nature of aspirations that both YR Practitioners and School Leaders have for children. (See section 1, 1.6 – 1.17) Hence it might be thought that expectations of the nature of provision and practice in YR classes is subject to a broad consensus. This was not, however, the picture presented by the evidence gathered by The Hundred Review; throughout the process of evidence gathering there were constant references to very specific pressures on YR classes and Practitioners. When questioned specifically within the online survey, 94.6% of respondents reported that there were external pressures and tensions on implementing effective YR practice.

1.2. The commissioned review of the most recent academic and research material (Appendix 10) identified evidence of the impact of notions of ‘school readiness’ (4.1 p.6) and ‘schoolification’ (4.2 p.7) on YR practice, specifically that these “...are viewed as essentially political actions and reflect a shift in values and beliefs about the role and purpose of early education within policy making at a national level. The evidence indicates that this shift is clearly impacting sharply on YR teaching and learning and a number of studies reveal that Teachers are feeling increasingly pressured by this agenda.” (Appendix 10 p.6).

1.3. Additionally research evidence suggests that “...that YR classes are preoccupied with enhancing and assessing children’s progress towards pre-defined learning goals and responding to the pressures of narrowing the gap targets in children’s attainment on exit from EYFS (end of YR) and this is causing stress and anxiety for Reception class Teachers...” (op cit p.10).

1.4. The impact of ‘datafication’ (Appendix 10, 5.3 p.12) was also cited as a contradictory stress on effective practice “...Teachers felt the datafication of the field greatly constrained them from adopting a more child-centred, social pedagogic interpretation of the EYFS” (op cit p.13).

1.5. Some participants in The Hundred Review cited the existence or the perceived existence of Government pressure to influence the type of practice and provision in YR towards a more generically didactic model that appears contradictory to evidence and research supporting a more balanced, responsible and developmentally appropriate approach to pedagogy in YR. Much of the tension arising from this real or perceived pressure manifests itself in the narrative and discussion of the ‘school readiness’ agenda. There was also evidence of concern that the policy of ‘closing the gap’ or ‘diminishing the difference’ could lead to inappropriate and surface level interventions which, whilst having some short term impact, were neither sustained nor sustainable. The continual changes in national policy, revisions of the EYFS Statutory Framework, and frequent and unpredictable changes to assessment and accountability measures were also cited as unhelpful pressures on YR.

1.6. Whilst pressure arising in relation to Ofsted inspections was also cited as a potential cause of tension in YR, there is increasing awareness that this can result from inaccurate information and presumptions that are not borne out by the Ofsted Inspection Framework⁽¹⁾. This perceived tension was accurately summed up by a YR Teacher; “Too much of education is driven by providing enough evidence for Ofsted. So many myths and fallacies about Ofsted - trying to please them takes up too much time. Trying to second guess what they are looking for when in fact it’s quite clear when you read the documents”. Pressure also arises from concern about the level of understanding of EYFS practice in general and YR in particular demonstrated by Ofsted Inspection teams. It is worth noting, however, that only 14.2% of respondents to the survey rated the Ofsted Inspectors' knowledge of effective and appropriate YR practice during their own inspections as ‘poor’.

1.7. In terms of understanding YR practice and provision, the views of parents and carers were sometimes identified as a potential source of tension. Presumptions and misunderstandings about the nature of young children’s learning ‘in school’ were cited as the source of additional pressures on YR Teachers and Practitioners. This appeared to work in two distinct ways. Sometimes it was reported as a belief that YR was not ‘proper school’ and so the curriculum should be completely ‘informal’ with no structured teaching, leading to concern if parents thought this was taking place. In other instances parents' view of YR as part of school could lead to assumptions that a more formalised and didactic approach to learning would be the child’s experience, with concern expressed if this did not appear to be the case.

1.8. A significant number of participants in The Hundred Review identified tensions created by a top down pressure from the rest of the school. This comprised two distinct strands:

1.8.1. The presence of specific curriculum outcomes, especially those in Literacy and Mathematics, which often had the tendency to pressurise YR into a more specific and overwhelmingly didactic approach, regardless of the statutory requirements of the EYFS Framework and the developmental level of individual children. In many cases this was felt to contradict effective YR practice and have a potentially negative impact on overall outcomes including, ironically, those for Literacy and Mathematics. The perceived educational cultural folklore that ‘earlier is better’, a phenomenon that is fundamentally challenged by current research, was often stated to be a key source of increased pressure towards delivering specific YR outcomes.

1.8.2. There was evidence of a widely held view that not all Teachers and School Leaders have a sufficiently robust understanding of YR practice and the principles that underpin the EYFS Statutory Framework. Specifically, within the areas of Literacy and Mathematics, there is not always the ‘counter-intuitive’ understanding and knowledge of how good outcomes in these vital curriculum areas are effectively supported, enhanced and acknowledged in EYFS in general and YR in particular. Identified in particular was a failure to recognise that a predominance of continual ‘drilling’ of specific skills within an adult defined context, without sufficient opportunities to explore, contextualise and internalise these, is unlikely to yield the required outcomes, either at the end of YR or beyond.

1.9. The need for more comprehensive knowledge and understanding of YR practice, in particular the diversity of what constitutes effective pedagogy and provision, and the means by which good outcomes are achieved is of wide concern amongst YR Teachers and Practitioners, and to some extent School Leaders. Given the potential impact of political policy on tensions and pressures for YR, it was notable that only 1.07% of respondents to the survey believed that the government had a good understanding of YR and only 0.28% believed that this was true of MPs and politicians. The portrayal of YR in the media also evoked little confidence with only 2.36% of respondents rating the understanding of this sector as ‘good’.

1.10. Underpinning much of the tension in YR and the pressure on effective practice and provision appear to be a broader lack of understanding, and respect, for what was often described in The Hundred Review as the ‘uniqueness’ of YR practice. Positioned at the end of the EYFS phase and the beginning of ‘school’, there were deeply felt concerns that this sense of ‘being in the crossfire’ was unhelpful and problematic. The nature of child development, the broad research consensus on what makes for effective pedagogical practice for 4 – 5 year olds and the specifics of the Birth – 7 age range are not seen as always acknowledged by the wider educational establishment. The contradiction between this lack of understanding and acknowledgement of the nature of children’s learning and development from Birth – 7, and the historical legacy of an early school starting age in England is not always recognised, with an inevitable impact on the understanding, expectations and perceptions of effective YR practice and provision.

2. Section summary

- The contested concepts of ‘school readiness’ and ‘schoolification’ are considered to be responsible for some of the pressures experienced in YR.
- It is believed that the DfE has a specific view on how YR should operate and this view is that YR should be more formalised in nature with an unbalanced emphasis on a purely didactic approach to teaching.
- There is a greater awareness that Ofsted documentation is clear about the requirements for YR, although mythologies persist about what is and isn’t expected by inspection teams.
- There is frequent misunderstanding demonstrated by parents about the nature and purpose of YR and its uniqueness within Primary, First and Infant Schools.
- Within schools there is often a top down pressure on YR that attempts to move practice towards a more formal approach with a greater focus on Literacy and Mathematics outcomes.
- There is evidence of misunderstanding of YR practice and provision, and a lack of awareness that a counter-intuitive approach to Literacy and Mathematics teaching is more likely to secure good outcomes.

Section 10

1. What are the internal issues that affect outcomes in YR?

1.1. The defined and agreed outcomes for YR, both in terms of the ELGs of the EYFS Statutory Framework and the broader aspirations outlined in section 1, 1.6 – 1.17 provide the context in which YR Practitioners operate and support children’s learning and development. The previous section (9) explored the external pressures on YR practice and provision which were identified in The Hundred Review as issues with the potential to compromise effective outcomes for children. In addition to these, some pressures and tensions on the effectiveness of practice and provision can be described as more internal in nature, emanating from the understanding, practice and practical considerations within the YR class itself and amongst the Teachers and Practitioners.

1.2. A significant aspect raised during the Review was that of workload and the pressures of time in that it was often felt that there was insufficient time to complete all the work that was required. The breadth and depth of expectation upon YR Teachers, both in terms of curriculum content and children's level of attainment, is also felt to be responsible for creating a sense of tension and anxiety within YR classes, not conducive to the ethos and learning environment aspired to by both School Leaders and YR Practitioners. The online survey found that 71.5% of respondents identified aspects of their role on which they spent too much time in relation to their perceived contribution to children's learning and development. Frequently cited in this regard was time spent on paperwork and an over emphasis on drilling formal literacy and mathematical skills at the expense of other aspects of the curriculum. The same percentage of respondents also indicated that there were aspects of practice that they felt were not allowed sufficient time. Prominent amongst these were; addressing the teaching of Specific Areas of Learning and Development particularly Expressive Arts and Design; interacting within the environment during child-initiated activities and engaging in in-depth conversations with children. This was summed up by one Practitioner as “Being able to observe children and expand their play to challenge the children, explore their ideas and deal with misconceptions.” What is perceived to be the relentless drive for coverage in Literacy and Mathematics was identified as responsible for this imbalance.

1.3. Respondents reported a perceived need to continually record assessments which, alongside a requirement to add next steps to this documentation regardless of the usefulness of the information recorded, was found to be a key area of concern. Added to these concerns was the anxiety of ensuring that tangible evidence was available to back up professional assessment judgements. The collecting of physical evidence for assessment purposes was a universal feature of YR classes, with 99.1% of survey respondents indicating that this was part of their everyday practice. Of these, 51.1% stated they spent too much of their time on evidence collection, with 36% believing that they had the balance right. Just over half of respondents (52%) felt that recording assessments was an ‘effective use of time’ although 79.8% felt that this was an activity that ‘had to be done’.

1.4. Alongside the perceived necessity to record assessments and gather evidence were concerns regarding the requirement to continually track children's progress over specified periods of time. In some cases this amounted to counting points of progress, using subdivisions of the Development Matters age bands (1), in order to generate a numerical score that could be calculated by the SLT and the Assessment Co-ordinator.

1.5. Some participants in The Hundred Review also identified the issues and tensions created by constraints on funding and the consequences of the difficult decisions that School Leaders were having to take regarding the allocation of scarce resources. A lack of opportunity to attend high quality CPD was seen as a major casualty of funding constraint, as were opportunities to purchase new resources and replace those that were old or damaged. In some cases the lack of funding culminates in withdrawal of support staff in YR which inevitably has a negative impact on adult:child ratios within the classroom. Where this was the case, Practitioners felt that sustaining desirable levels of personal interaction and support for all children was extremely challenging.

1.6. A widespread concern, expressed throughout The Hundred Review, was an anxiety about what was expected of YR Practitioners; more specifically what they were expected to do and how they were expected to do it. Although there is a clear definition of this within the EYFS Statutory Framework and, more recently, an explicit definition from Ofsted (Appendix 7), there is still confusion within YR classes about what and how to teach. 88.2% of respondents to the survey believed that there was confusion regarding the implementation of effective YR practice and how best to secure good outcomes for children. YR Practitioners frequently reported that they felt pulled in different directions and had become uncertain about what was considered to be the 'right thing to do'. Conflicting messages from outside agencies, coupled with the external pressures described in section 9, have established a perfect storm of confusion, uncertainty, lack of confidence and 'compliance anxiety' from which there does not appear to be any respite. As one Practitioner stated: "There seem to be two conflicting schools of thought. One advocating child led and effective play with results and one requirement for adult-led and mini KS1 style lessons."

1.7. The range and usefulness (or otherwise) of available CPD was also identified as a dimension in this confusion of messages, with the prevalence of quick fix solutions, templates and un-evidenced fads, schemes and gimmicks cited as matter of serious concern, in addition to the often diametric contradiction between differing views of the effectiveness of a range of approaches to pedagogy and provision.

1.8. Despite the existence of significant evidence that underpins the principles of effective YR provision and a broad consensus on aspirations for the purpose of YR, there remain tensions between opposing approaches that do not appear to be moving towards reconciliation. More concerning for the future development of effective and consistent YR practice and provision is the prevalence of approaches made popular through social media, aggressive marketing and charismatic delivery which are not underpinned by any evidence of positive impact on outcomes, in some cases appearing to have the opposite effect.

1.9. A contributory factor in this confusion exists within the language that describes YR practice and the lack of agreed definitions for some of the terminology which forms a significant part of the pedagogical narrative. Examples of this lack of consistency include:

1.9.1. The term ‘play’; used continually to describe aspects of children’s activity and a philosophical principle to which all Practitioners, and School Leaders, ascribe. The description of ‘children learning through play’ and the concept of ‘play based learning’ were common phrases within all strands of evidence for The Hundred Review. There does not, however, appear to be a consistent definition of ‘play’ and the vast range of interpretations render the term problematic. In some cases it was used to describe high quality activity that was child initiated and then perhaps supported by an adult, whilst in others it was a catch all phrase for periods of time when children were not working with an adult, irrespective of the quality of learning that was taking place.

1.9.2. The terms ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ are often used within the dialogue of YR practice with the implicit assumption that the former was a negative aspect of pedagogy and the latter a positive one. However, all Practitioners within The Hundred Review recognised the need for balance between approaches, both to meet the needs of individual learners and dependent upon the knowledge and skills being learned. The over simplified negative and positive associations with these terms, when used regardless of context, were therefore unhelpful in constructing an understanding of effective YR pedagogy.

1.9.3. The term ‘teaching’ itself is not always fully understood, despite the definitions identified above. The term itself is not always recognised to include all behaviours and decisions that support children’s learning, instead is often considered to be an intrinsically ‘didactic’ approach rather than a broader reality.

1.9.4. A misunderstanding of the term ‘assessment’ still exists in some cases, despite the definition that exists within the EYFS Statutory Framework. A mistaken belief persists that this refers only to the collection of tangible evidence and physical recording that feeds accountability systems. Although such activity forms part of the definition of assessment, the primary purpose of assessment is to know and understand children in order to support their ongoing learning and development. Aligned to this limited understanding is an often hostile perception of the term ‘data’ and ‘outcomes’ as though these are again, inherently negative entities. However, as data is simply one type of summary of information, and outcomes are the aspirations for children's learning and development of YR Teachers towards which they direct their practice, this negative association is unhelpful in exploring and explaining what the impact of effective YR pedagogy looks like in practice.

2. Section summary

- There are concerns regarding the amount of coverage expected in YR, especially for specific aspects of Literacy and Mathematics, and this often detracts from opportunities to support other areas of children’s learning and development.
- The issues of recording and tracking progress were also cited as creating internal pressures on YR practice.
- Restrictions and cuts in funding were also identified as causes of pressure, notably through negative impacts on adult:child ratios and opportunities to engage in CPD.
- There is confusion regarding the nature of YR practice and how this is perceived and understood; this has often resulted in YR Practitioners being uncertain about what is expected of them.
- There is a lack of confidence in the understanding of some of the terminology used in YR and how this relates to effective practice. Words like ‘play’, ‘teaching’, ‘formal/informal’ and ‘assessment’ are subject to widely varying interpretation and there is a lack of agreement on their specific meaning in YR. This misunderstanding and lack of clarity often impacts on the quality of provision and the way it is perceived and evaluated.

Section 11

1. Conclusions

- 1.1.** There is a broad agreement amongst most YR Practitioners and School Leaders as to the purpose of the YR and the most developmentally appropriate outcomes for children in this year group. This is reflected in longitudinal research and international comparative studies for children of this age and provides a solid consensus on the aspirations for YR practice. There is overwhelming support for the current EYFS Statutory Framework and a deep commitment to ensure that YR remains an integral part of the EYFS.
- 1.2.** The understanding of pedagogy and practice in YR and its uniqueness within a school environment is not always fully acknowledged at either national or local strategic levels. There is strong feeling amongst YR Teachers and Practitioners that pressures and tensions emanating from this lack of understanding can compromise effective YR practice and have a negative impact on outcomes for children.
- 1.3.** The need for children to have a good knowledge and understanding of the skills required for successful Literacy and Mathematics outcomes is unanimously supported by YR Teachers and Practitioners. However, in order for children to attain good outcomes in Literacy and Mathematics, a range of other contributory knowledge, skills, experiences and learning behaviours are equally important, and successful outcomes in these two areas of learning are dependent on more than the acquisition of formal skills. This counter-intuitive approach to early Literacy and Mathematics is often misunderstood or its importance not acknowledged, with a negative effect on the very outcomes that are being worked towards.
- 1.4.** While there is evidence of a good understanding of the purposes of assessment to support learning and enable accountability, there is often a tension with how this translates into school systems. This tension often revolves around which aspects of children's learning and development are assessed and whether the most significant and important aspects are recorded and summarised appropriately. There was a strong commitment to demonstrate progress in a way that reflects all aspects of children's learning and development.
- 1.5.** There is widespread agreement about the importance of transition both into and out of YR, and an acknowledgement amongst Practitioners and School Leaders of the importance of continuity of provision, pedagogy and assessment across these transitions so as to avoid the consequences of dramatic changes in approach.

1.6. Despite the existence of the EYFS Statutory Framework and the Ofsted definition of teaching, there is widespread confusion regarding the expectations of YR practice and the nature of YR pedagogy, specifically:

- A lack of clarity and agreement exists regarding what constitutes effective teaching in YR classes, with different views on what this is and what this looks like in practice. This often undermines YR Practitioners' confidence in their own professionalism as educators.
- There is often an unhelpful segregation and polarisation of different traditions and pedagogical approaches, partially responsible for confused expectations and inconsistent evaluation of practice.
- Differing interpretations of the educational terminology used in YR and a lack of agreed definitions, frequently result in inconsistencies and misunderstanding.
- There is over emphasis and anxiety about what type of activity children are engaged with rather than evaluation of its effectiveness in supporting good outcomes.
- Effective teaching in YR is a complex process, resulting from the experience of highly skilled and knowledgeable professionals enabled to act in a flexible and responsive way. Good outcomes for children are not achieved when teaching in YR is reduced to a simplistic, linear, cause and effect methodology, nor when YR practice is reliant on purely unstructured access to provision.

Section 12

1. The Hundred Review Report and Expert Panel make the following recommendations:

- 1.1. In light of the overwhelming support from School Leaders and Teachers, coupled with the research evidence of effective and appropriate pedagogy for children of this age, the DfE should reaffirm its commitment to ensuring that YR remains an integral part of the EYFS.
- 1.2. In order to ensure that DfE policy is appropriately informed an advisory panel of recognised Early Years Experts that includes specialists in YR should be convened to meet regularly with the Secretary of State for Education, appropriate ministers and other national stakeholders.
- 1.3. Greater awareness needs to be made of the developmental processes that are required to secure competent Literacy and Mathematical skills and knowledge, and in particular how this is most effectively supported in YR.
- 1.4. To address some of the concerns regarding the GLD outcomes for the end of YR, an informed review of the 'pitch' of the ELGs for Literacy and Mathematics should be undertaken, in conjunction with an evaluation of the use and publication of national EYFS Profile data.
- 1.5. To fully acknowledge and understand the importance and impact of effective YR practice, a member of every Infant, First and Primary School's SLT should have specific responsibility for supporting and challenging YR. Where appropriate and necessary, CPD and peer support for Senior Leaders should be made available in order to facilitate this.
- 1.6. The lack of clarity and consensus regarding key terminology in YR and its impact on and application to everyday practice needs to be addressed. A national symposium needs to be convened within which all stakeholders and representatives would define and agree the meaning of key terminology and its application to practice.
- 1.7. To support the clarity of terminology and consistency of effective practice, a suite of nationally recognised materials and case studies needs to be developed and published to support YR Teachers, School Leaders and stakeholders.

Appendices

1. EYFS Statutory Framework ([Download pdf](#))
2. EYFS Prime Areas ([Download pdf](#))
3. EYFS Specific Areas ([Download pdf](#))
4. EYFS CoEL ([Download pdf](#))
5. EYFSP Handbook ([Download pdf](#))
6. EYFS Profile information and results ([Download pdf](#))
7. Ofsted definition of teaching (page 43)
8. The Leuven Scales of Well-being and Involvement (page 44)
9. TSC Report “Effective Primary Teaching Practice (2016)” ([Download pdf](#))
10. CREC Report “The Hundred Review: What research tells us about effective pedagogic practice and children’s outcomes in the Reception year (March 2017)” ([Download pdf](#))
11. Process of evidence gathering
 - 11.1. Details of Focus Groups (page 46)
 - 11.2. Focus Group recording template (page 47)
 - 11.3. School Visit list (page 48)
 - 11.4. School Visit recording template (page 50)
 - 11.5. Survey questions ([Download pdf](#))

Appendix 7: Ofsted definition of teaching

“Teaching should not be taken to imply a ‘top down’ or formal way of working. It is a broad term which covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities: communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment they provide and the attention to the physical environment as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how Practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do as well as take account of their interests and dispositions to learning (Characteristics of Effective Learning), and use this information to plan children’s next steps in learning and monitor their progress.”

Early Years Inspection Handbook, Ofsted, June 2015; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015>

Appendix 8: The Leuven Scales of Well-being and Involvement

The Leuven Scale for Well-being

Level	Well-being	Signals
1	Extremely Low	The child clearly shows signs of discomfort such as crying or screaming. They may look dejected, sad, frightened or angry. The child does not respond to the environment, avoids contact and is withdrawn. The child may behave aggressively, hurting him/herself or others.
2	Low	The posture, facial expression and actions indicate that the child does not feel at ease. However the signals are less explicit than below level 1 or the sense of discomfort is not expressed the whole time.
3	Moderate	The child has a neutral posture. Facial expression and posture show little or no emotion. There are no signs indicating sadness or pleasure, comfort or discomfort.
4	High	The child shows signals of satisfaction (as listed under level 5). However, the signals indicating pleasure are not constantly present in the same intensity.
5	Extremely High	The child looks happy and cheerful, smiles, cries out with pleasure. They may be lively and full of energy. Actions can be spontaneous and expressive. The child may talk to him/herself, play with sounds, hum, sing. The child appears relaxed and does not show any signs of stress or tension. He/she is open and accessible to the environment. The child expresses self-confidence and self-assurance.

The Leuven Scale for Involvement

Level	Involvement	Signals
1	Extremely Low	Activity is simple, repetitive and passive. The child seems absent and displays no energy. They may stare into space or look around to see what others are doing.
2	Low	Frequently interrupted activity. The child will be engaged in the activity for some of the time they are observed, but there will be moments of non-activity when they will stare into space, or be distracted by what is going on around them.
3	Moderate	Mainly continuous activity. The child is busy with the activity but at a fairly routine level and there are few signs of real involvement. They make some progress with what they are doing but don't show much energy and concentration and can be easily distracted.
4	High	Continuous activity with intense moments. The child's activity has intense moments and at times they seem involved. They are not easily distracted.
5	Extremely High	The child shows continuous and intense activity revealing the greatest involvement. They are concentrated, creative, energetic and persistent throughout nearly all observed period.

Appendix 11.1: Process of evidence gathering – Details of Focus Groups

1. Huddersfield 26.01.17
2. Birmingham 30.01.17
3. London (MATs) 30.01.17
4. Bristol 01.02.17
5. Norwich 01.02.17
6. London 03.02.17
7. Newcastle 08.02.17
8. London 09.02.17

Appendix 11.2: Process of evidence gathering – Focus Group recording template

The Hundred Review – Focus Group Template

Introductory text

The Hundred Review of Reception is a major national review of policy and practice in YR. The review will draw on the expertise of hundreds of Practitioners, including Reception Teachers, School Leaders, academics and others engaged with the development of good practice in Early Childhood Education. This will be a unique opportunity to contribute to a Practitioner and YR specialist led review of YR.

The aim of the Focus group will be to explore a range of issues that affect YR practice, provision and outcomes and provide YR Practitioners with an opportunity to contribute their experiences, knowledge and ideas to the findings and recommendations of the review.

Contributions will be made in confidence and a group record of the discussions will not identify specific schools or individuals.

There will be 3 specific questions that will form the basis of discussions. Supplementary questions may be used to further explore and clarify ideas.

This is a genuine attempt to address the questions involved, there are no right answers or expectations. It is important to listen to, acknowledge and respect all opinions.

The Early Excellence facilitator will not participate in discussion and will record salient points as they emerge.

This will be summarised and agreed at the end of the Focus Group meeting.

Thank you for participating.

Focus Group:

Date:

Number of participants:

Question 1

Do you believe that the EYFS framework is appropriate for all Reception aged children? If so why, and if not why not?

Notes

Agreed Summary

Question 2

What do you think is the purpose of the Reception Year?

Notes

Agreed Summary

Question 3

What (if any) are the challenges of teaching in YR?

Notes

Agreed Summary

Appendix 11.3: Process of evidence gathering – School Visit list

School Name	LA
1. Ryhope Infant Academy	Sunderland
2. Kirk Sandall Infant Academy School	Doncaster
3. Woodfield Primary	Doncaster
4. Chellaston Infant	Derby City
5. All Saints CofE Infant School	Nottingham
6. Redlands Primary	Leicestershire
7. Robert Miles Infant School	Nottinghamshire
8. Cliffe Hill Community Primary School	Halifax
9. Trevithick Learning Academy	Cornwall
10. Farnham Primary	Bradford
11. All Saints CofE Infant	Leicestershire
12. Heworth Primary School	York
13. St Ives Infant School	Cornwall
14. Barnes Primary	Sunderland
15. Ellenbrook Primary School	Salford
16. Robert Mellors Primary	Nottingham
17. Lower Kersal Primary School	Salford
18. Parc Eglos Primary School	Cornwall
19. The Priory Witham Academy	Cheshire
20. Barnton Primary	Cheshire
21. Saint John Evangelist Catholic Primary School	Islington
22. West Earlham Nursery and Infant School	Norwich
23. Dixons Allerton Academy	Bradford
24. The Priory Witham Academy	Lincoln
25. St. Nicholas CofE	Nottingham
26. Hargrave Park Primary School	Islington
27. Tollgate Primary	Ipswich
28. Hillside Primary	Ipswich
29. Lord Deramore's	York
30. Brewster Avenue Infant School	Peterborough
31. Parkwood Academy	Essex
32. Terling Primary School	Essex

School Name	LA
33. Castle Hill Infant School (part of MAT)	Norfolk
34. Cliff Lane Primary School	Ipswich
35. St Marys Catholic Primary	Ipswich
36. Wells Primary School	Essex
37. Fishergate Primary School	York
38. Tuel Lane Infants	Calderdale
39. Pooles Park Primary School	Islington
40. Writtle Infant School	Essex
41. Collingwood Primary	South Woodham Ferrers
42. Indian Queens Primary School	Cornwall
43. Nether Alderley Primary School	Cheshire
44. St Marys Catholic Primary School	Islington

Appendix 11.4: Process of evidence gathering – School Visit recording template

The Hundred Review – School Visit Record Sheet

School reference:

School name:

Type:

GLD % 2016:

Visit carried out by:

Date and time of visit:

Discussion with Headteacher/Senior School Leader

Level of leader:

EYFS experience:

Do you believe that the EYFS Framework is appropriate for all Reception aged children?

Are there any aspects of the EYFS that worry you?

Do you think that YR should remain part of the EYFS?

If yes why, if no why not...

What are the current challenges to you as a Headteacher/SLT?

What is driving these challenges?

To what extent do you think these challenges can be resolved through effective practice in YR?

How well equipped to you feel to support, lead and challenge practice in YR?

Tour of YR Provision

Note:

Physical Provision/AOPs:

Outdoor Provision:

CI/AD Activities:

Types of AD Activities:

Interactions in CI:

Discussion with YR Practitioners

Total number of Practitioners:

Number of Teachers:

Number of TAs:

Number of others (please specify):

Do you believe that the EYFS Framework is appropriate for all Reception aged children?

Are there any aspects of the EYFS that worry you?

Do you think that YR should remain part of the EYFS?
If yes why, if no why not...

Does this present any challenges to you as a teacher?

What is driving these challenges?

To what extent do you think these challenges can be resolved through effective practice in YR?

How are you supported, lead and challenged as a YR practitioner?

The Hundred Review Expert Panel

With thanks to our Expert Panel for their reflective and thoughtful participation in shaping the final recommendations of the report. It was a real privilege to work with so many committed and passionate Early Years Educators keen to work so intensely to defend what we know is right for children.

Rhio Ayeh-Kumi

Globe Primary School

Kate Beaumont

Seven Kings School

Cathy Bee

Royal Borough of Greenwich LA

Elaine Bennett

Friars Primary School and Nursery

Lydia Cuddy-Gibbs

ARK Schools

Chris Currie

Dixons Allerton Academy

Solin Flash

Harris Primary Academy

Sally Hickman

Rutland LA

Sarah Mardell

West Earlham Infant and Nursery

Helen Moylett

Independent Consultant

Julia Norman

Wells Primary and Nursery School

Cassandra Williams

Adventure Learning Academy Trust

About the Authors

Jan Dubiel, Early Excellence National Director

Jan Dubiel is the National Director at Early Excellence and works as part of the team to support Early Years Practitioners and settings in all aspects of practice and provision. Having trained as an Early Years specialist, Jan worked as a nursery, Reception and Y1 Teacher in schools across the country, leading teams as an Early Years Co-ordinator. Following roles as an Early Years Consultant and Senior Adviser, he was appointed by the then Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to lead on the management of the (Early Years) Foundation Stage Profile, and had national responsibility for its implementation and moderation, developing guidance and support materials and working at a strategic level with policy makers.

Jan has developed a national and international reputation as a conference speaker, consultant and trainer and he has written widely on different aspects of Early Years pedagogy. His first book 'Effective Assessment in the EYFS' was published by SAGE in 2014.



Denise Kilner, Early Excellence Curriculum Consultant

Denise is a highly experienced consultant, having worked with a Local Authority supporting schools and settings in their pursuit of quality practice. Denise has taught every age group across the EYFS and KS1. She was the EYFS Lead and Deputy Headteacher of a large infant school leading in curriculum development across the whole school. Denise then moved onto Headship and led a nursery school for five years with an emphasis on developing children's thinking, undertaking educational research projects and initiating collaborative working with other settings and educationalists.



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