

Early Years Foundation Stage and Playwork



Leonie Wilson, Playwork Communication Officer for SkillsActive, explains the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and how it impacts on playworkers.

There has been a heated debate surrounding the EYFS ever since plans were unveiled in 2005, not just around the implications for children but also for the adults working with them. With the EYFS coming into force this September, SkillsActive, as the Sector Skills Council for playwork, is engaged in discussion with the Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF) on the best way forward for playworkers recognising the ethos and good practice of the sector.

Statutory requirement

The EYFS will become statutory requirement for all schools and Early Years providers working with children from birth to five and, as a small number of children in playwork settings are four or five years' old, there is an over-lap leading to a great deal of confusion and concern.

"SkillsActive has been working with the DCSF to raise these concerns and help clear up the confusion," says Paul Bonel, Head of Playwork at SkillsActive, "and we've been assured by the DCSF that as long as playworkers are adhering to the Playwork Principles they will already be in a good position to meet the EYFS requirements".

What's more, the EYFS assessment scales only need to be completed by the child's primary setting - the place where the child spends the majority of their time between 8am-6pm. This means that play settings, as they operate before and after school as well as during the holidays, are counted as

secondary settings. "Whilst recognising that playworkers do make a valuable contribution, it is a supporting role to the work of the primary settings such as schools or nurseries" says Paul. "The DCSF has made an exemption of all open access settings and it is our opinion that secondary settings, such as before and after school clubs, holiday clubs and playschemes should be similarly exempt or given a special status that recognises the supporting role".

"Playworkers work with children in a very special way that recognises their right to freely chosen play in a creative environment with minimal adult intervention," says Paul. "Playworkers are well placed to work constructively with teachers, nursery workers, child carers and others in support of the EYFS but its implementation can't be their primary function".

Qualifications

Of major concern is the position of qualifications. As it currently stands, playwork settings with four and five year olds will be required to register but none of our playwork qualifications are able to meet the criteria for qualifications that are being placed on the Early Years Register database. SkillsActive is in constant dialogue with the DCSF and, as Paul says, "We will also be taking up this issue when we meet the Children's Minister, Kevin Brennan on the 2 June".

"This does feel quite difficult but is in no way unsolvable," says Paul. "In an ideal world, all playwork settings, not just open access, would be exempt but we understand that this is no longer possible." And, in looking forward, Paul suggests two things need to happen. "Firstly, we want a public statement from the DCSF to confirm the secondary and support role of playworkers. Secondly, we need the Early Years Register database to include playwork qualifications in recognition of that role."

SkillsActive will continue to take these issues forward with DCSF, CWDC and the sector. For more information and FAQs on the Early Years Foundation Stage visit our website **W:** www.skillsactive.com/playwork or the DCSF website **W:** www.dfes.gov.uk.