Resources and guidance for childcare, play settings and schools on early childhood play, learning and care for 0 to 5 year olds in Wales: Findings from engagement with stakeholders, October to December 2023

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Findings from engagement with stakeholders, October – December 2023

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1. Background

1.1. In June 2023 as part of our Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care approach for 0–5-year-olds in Wales, the following resources were published in draft, to support practitioners in providing quality early childhood play, learning and care:

- Quality Framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales (ECPLC QF)
- Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales: A Reflective Practice Toolkit
- Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Developmental Pathways for 0-3

1.2. These resources were published in draft for one year to enable engagement and feedback on how the resources were being implemented in practice and to identify areas for further amendment including the need for any additional supporting materials.

1.3.

1.4. The resources were developed for all childcare and play settings and schools in Wales to adopt, should they wish to do so, and in their entirety, to support quality provision for all babies and young children in Wales.

1.5. Between October and December 2023 a survey was undertaken asking for views on the published resources in respect to, how they were being implemented in practice and on areas for further amendment including any additional supporting materials required.

1.6. The survey was designed and delivered by the Childcare, Families and Children Research and Evidence team within the Welsh Government. The survey was designed to capture feedback on each of the resources separately. A copy of the questionnaire used is attached at Annex 1 of this report.

1.7. The survey was hosted online using Smart Survey. It was distributed through contacts made as part of the development of the resources, as well as through wider networks. Responses were sought from childcare practitioners and managers, childminders and their assistants, leaders and assistants of playgroups, playworkers, Flying Start practitioners, teaching assistants, teachers, Early Years Advisory Teachers and Foundation Learning leads within education settings, regional consortia and local authorities.

1.8. This report presents a summary of responses received to the survey. Respondents were asked not to provide any information that could be used to identify themselves or any other person, and responses were reviewed to ensure no such information was included. As a result, the evidence presented in this paper is completely anonymous.

2. Overview of responses

2.1. A total of 69 responses were received. Respondents were asked to indicate their professional role. Table 1 below presents a summary of these roles.

Table 1: Responses to the question 'What is your current role?'

	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Childcare practitioner	40	58.0%
Education practitioner	12	17.4%
Playwork practitioner	3	4.3%
Other (please specify):	14	20.3%
Total	**69**	

2.2. Table 1 shows that a majority of respondents were childcare practitioners (58 per cent), with smaller proportions of respondents being education practitioners, playwork practitioners and doing 'other' roles. Of those reporting 'other' roles, six were directly involved in childcare (including owners and managers of childcare services), and the remainder included academics, , advisory teachers and the third sector.

2.3. Respondents can be broadly categorised as working principally in either childcare (n=51) or education (n=18). These categories will be referred to throughout this report.

2.4. Table 2 below shows the types of settings in which respondents indicated that they work.

Table 2: Responses to the question 'What type of setting do you work in?'

	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Childminder	10	14.5%
Private nursery	19	27.5%
Local authority-maintained nursery	5	7.2%
School-based nursery	11	15.9%
Playwork provider	2	2.9%
Other (please specify):	22	31.9%
Total	69	

2.5. Table 2 shows that there was no one type of setting where a majority of respondents worked. Private nurseries were the type with the largest number of respondents, though alarge number selected 'other'. Those selecting 'other' included English-medium non-maintained childcare and play services (n=8). Cylchoedd meithrin (Welsh-language non-maintained nurseries, n=5), local authorities (n=4) and others in higher education and early years umbrella organisations. Overall, and combined with findings in Table 1, these responses indicate that early years practitioners responding to this survey work in a diverse range of settings.

2.6. Table 3 below indicates that responses were received from practitioners living in most, but not all, local authority areas of Wales.

Table 3: Responses to the question 'In which local authority are you based?'

	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Isle of Anglesey	0	0.0%
Gwynedd	6	8.8%
Conwy	4	5.9%
Denbighshire	4	5.9%
Flintshire	4	5.9%
Wrexham	6	8.8%
Powys	1	1.5%
Ceredigion	2	2.9%
Pembrokeshire	0	0.0%
Carmarthenshire	1	1.5%
Swansea	1	1.5%
Neath Port Talbot	1	1.5%
Bridgend	5	7.4%
The Vale of Glamorgan	4	5.9%
Cardiff	4	5.9%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	1	1.5%
Merthyr Tydfil	2	2.9%
Caerphilly	3	4.4%
Blaenau Gwent	5	7.4%
Torfaen	4	5.9%
Monmouthshire	7	10.3%
Newport	1	1.5%
Don't know	2	2.9%
No response	1	1.5%
TOTAL	69	

2.7.   No responses were received from the Isle of Anglesey or Pembrokeshire, while larger numbers were received from Monmouthshire (7), Gwynedd (6) and Wrexham (6). This is likely to be a feature of the distribution of the survey through various networks and the subsequent 'snowball' effect as respondents passed on information to contacts in their immediate networks. In the remainder of this report, findings will be discussed at an all-Wales level.

3. The Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Quality Framework

3.1. Respondents were asked specific questions about the Quality Framework. 62 of the 69 respondents (90 per cent) had heard of the Quality Framework. Respondents working principally in childcare were more likely to have heard of the Quality Framework (94 per cent) compared to those working principally in education (78 per cent).

3.2. Respondents had heard about the Quality Framework through a variety of different sources, with just under half (48.5 per cent) hearing about it through an early years organisation, and equal amounts of respondents (17.6 per cent) hearing about it through a colleague or manager, or through the Welsh Government website.

3.3. While 90 per cent of respondents had heard of the Quality Framework, fewer respondents (65 per cent) had read the document. Of those who had read the document (45), nearly all thought that it was easy to read (43), used relevant language (44) and was relevant to the work that they did (44).

3.4. The most common theme in the comments related to the relationship between the Quality Framework and Curriculum for Wales and specifically the curriculum for non-maintained settings. This included the use of common terminology, such as a common set of 'enablers'.

> "Many of our childcare settings are also early education providers and this Framework clearly links with the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Settings, which makes it easy to use and it fills [sic] well with what they should already be doing in their setting."

3.5. Some comments highlighted that the Framework had particular value in providing an approach to supporting the youngest children, those aged 0-3. Several comments highlighted the importance of play and of child-centred learning and development, and that this was well reflected within the Framework.

> "It's great to finally have a document relating to this age group where play and child centred approach is at the heart"

3.6. However, other comments noted the potential for confusion. as the Framework uses slightly different terminology than some other relevant documentation, such as the assessment guidance for early years.

> "The language used in the assessment document that is used in adjacent to this document does not match and it takes a lot of time to match up. Would have been far simpler to use same sections/ pathways for the assessment document."

3.7. A small number of respondents felt that the Framework did not provide enough information to be used to inform curriculum design and to influence assessment.

> "There's little on the 'what' in child development such as early domains of learning"

> "[There is] no clarification on how to assess and document the observations"

3.8. Other respondents noted the length and complexity of the document, and how, in combination with other documents produced around curriculum development, this would create work for practitioners and potentially create confusion if it was not clear how documents should be used together. Some respondents called for training, or for the use of exemplars, to illustrate how the framework should be used in practice.

> "It can seem like a big job at first glance when you see 44 pages, however that is all paperwork in childcare."

> "It has caused a little bit of confusion from settings already implementing the [Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings] as a few have thought it was replacing the curriculum - it has taken a lot of explanation from our team as to were it fits with the curriculum."

> "[We need] clearer explanation/training of how the document should be used"

3.9. Of those who had read the Framework, around 71 per cent (32) felt that the Framework had influenced their practice. A similar proportion felt that the Framework made them more confident in their role, and that the Framework had encouraged them to focus on child development and on play.

4. The Reflective Practice Toolkit

4.1.　44 of 69 respondents (64 per cent) had heard of the Reflective Practice Toolkit, significantly less than had heard of the Quality Framework (90 per cent). As with the Quality Framework, around half of those who had heard of the document (23) had done so through an early years organisation, with others hearing through the Welsh Government website (11) or a colleague or manager (9).

4.2.　Around 50 per cent of survey respondents (35) had read the Reflective Practice Toolkit. Of those who had read it, all stated that it was easy to read, used relevant language and was relevant to their work.

4.3.　Many of the respondents who had read the Reflective Practice Toolkit made positive comments about how it provides practical opportunities for practitioners to take time to consider their work and how it contributes to their thinking about children's development.

> "It gives helpful ideas to encourage the child's development and gives examples of templates to use to see if what we are doing is helping the children or if we need to change something."

4.4.　Some respondents welcomed the inclusion of questions that encourage self-reflection, and one suggested that more of these could be included. In particular, these were highlighted as useful for staff management and supervision, and for producing self evaluation reports (SERs) and setting improvement plans (SIPs) as part of services' work in providing education.

> "The Reflective Practice Toolkit is a useful document to assist settings in writing their self evaluation report (SER) and setting improvement plan (SIP). It also provides a basis for local authority childcare staff to use when visiting and supporting settings."

4.5.　A small number of comments were made about the difficulty of applying the Reflective Practice Toolkit in smaller settings.

> "Can be overwhelming for a childminder or a manager of a small private nursery as no one to talk you through it and bounce ideas off.

4.6.　Of those who had read the Reflective Practice Toolkit, 80 per cent (29) felt that it had influenced their practice and made them more confident when planning provision. Around 83 per cent (30) felt it had encouraged them to place more emphasis on play in their work, while 77 per cent (28) felt it encouraged them to focus more on children's development.

5. Developmental Pathways 0-3

5.1. 54 of 69 respondents (78 per cent) had heard of the Developmental Pathways 0-3 document, fewer than had heard of the Quality Framework, but more than had heard of the Reflective Practice Toolkit.

5.2. As with the Quality Framework and the Reflective Practice Toolkit, the most common route for hearing about the Development Pathways 0-3 document was through early years membership organisations (25 respondents, or 46 per cent of those who had heard of the document). This was followed by the Welsh Government website (16 respondents, or 30 per cent).

5.3. Around 60 per cent of respondents to the survey (41) had read the Developmental Pathways 0-3 document. Of the 41 who had read it, 40 agreed that it was easy to read and was relevant to their work. All 41 agreed that the document used language that is relevant to the early years sector.

5.4. In written comments, some respondents emphasised that the document had a straight-forward structure and was easy to read and to follow.

> "We use this in our nursery and link it with areas in the children's observations …Staff find it easy to do observations based on the pathways especially as they link with the preschool non maintained section of the nursery"

5.5. Several respondents welcomed the focus of the document on the youngest age groups, with one noting a lack of alternative materials with similar focus.

> "It is wonderful to have a working document for the 0 to 3s we care for and celebrate the importance of the first years of young people's life."

> "I have previously worked in England so [was] shocked at the lack of guidance originally for 0-3 practitioners. This is well over due"

5.6. However, a small number of respondents felt that improvements could be made in terms of providing more clarity on specific examples and definitions.

> "…as there are no 'tick box' some find [it] hard to see if a child is progressing"

> "Some key developments not mentioned in statements such as walking – [adding this] may support some new practitioners with awareness [of] when to signpost for further support with areas such as physical."

5.7. Of those who had read the Developmental Pathways 0-3 document (40), 73 per cent (30) felt that it had influenced their practice and encouraged them to place more emphasis on play in their work. 73 per cent of those who had read the resource (30) felt it had encouraged them to focus on children's development, and 78 per cent (32) felt it had made them more confident when planning provision.

6. Summary

6.1.   Survey respondents were asked for their views on a suite of resources:

   • Quality Framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales (ECPLC QF)
   • Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales: A Reflective Practice Toolkit
   • Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Developmental Pathways for 0-3

6.2.   Of 69 respondents to the survey, a majority had both heard of and read all three resources for childcare, play settings and schools on early childhood play, learning and care for 0 to 5 year olds in Wales. .

6.3.   The most common way of hearing of these resources was through early years organisations, followed by the Welsh Government website.

6.4.   Respondents were positive about the overall language and presentation used in the resources, and most felt the resources were relevant to their work. Some respondents wanted to see more practical examples, including specific child development steps and examples of how progress could be assessed and recorded.

6.5.   Most of those who had read the resources found that they had influenced their practice, made them more confident in planning, and encouraged them to place more emphasis on play and on children's development.

Annex 1 – Questionnaire - Quality Framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales and supporting materials

Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: supporting documents questionnaire

In June 2023 as part of our Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care approach for 0–5-year-olds in Wales, the following documents were published, to support practitioners in providing quality early childhood play, learning and care:

- **A Quality Framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales.**
- **Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales: A Reflective Practice Toolkit**
- **Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Developmental Pathways for 0-3**

These documents have been developed by practitioners, for practitioners for all childcare and play settings and schools in Wales to adopt, should they wish to do so, and in their entirety, to support quality provision for all babies and young children in Wales.

This survey provides an opportunity to provide us with views on the suite of documents as they stand, how they are being implemented in practice and identify areas for further amendment including any additional supporting materials required. We are particularly interested in hearing from childcare practitioners and managers, childminders and their assistants, leaders and assistants of playgroups, playworkers, Flying Start practitioners, teaching assistants, teachers, Early Years Advisory Teachers and Foundation Learning leads within education settings, regional consortia and local authorities.

The survey will not ask you any personal information about yourself or anyone else, and all responses will be treated as anonymous. In your responses, please do not provide any information that could be used to identify you or anyone else. If any personal data is included in responses, we will delete this before undertaking our analysis.

The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. We are very grateful for your time.

2. Your background

1. What is your current role?

☐ Childcare practitioner

☐ Education practitioner

☐ Playwork practitioner

☐ Other (please specify):

_____

2. What type of setting do you work in?

☐ Childminder

☐ Private nursery

☐ Local authority-maintained nursery

☐ School-based nursery

☐ Playwork provider

☐ Other (please specify):

_____

3. Which local authority area are you based in?

☐ Isle of Anglesey

☐ Gwynedd

☐ Conwy

☐ Denbighshire

☐ Flintshire

☐ Wrexham

- [ ] Powys

- [ ] Ceredigion

- [ ] Pembrokeshire

- [ ] Carmarthenshire

- [ ] Swansea

- [ ] Neath Port Talbot

- [ ] Bridgend

- [ ] The Vale of Glamorgan

- [ ] Cardiff

- [ ] Rhondda Cynon Taf

- [ ] Merthyr Tydfil

- [ ] Caerphilly

- [ ] Blaenau Gwent

- [ ] Torfaen

- [ ] Monmouthshire

- [ ] Newport

- [ ] Don't know

3. The Framework

Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Quality Framework

The Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Quality Framework for Wales draws together the various requirements for delivering the type of high-quality provision needed in Wales. Leaders and practitioners from across the childcare and playwork settings and schools should use this framework to guide provision; parents/carers can use it to better understand provision on offer to their child and local authorities can use it to support development and improvement of provision.

4. Please read the following statement and tell us whether you agree or disagree with it.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I have heard of the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Quality Framework for Wales	☐	☐	☐

4. The Framework

5. Please read the following statement and tell us whether you agree or disagree with it.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I have read the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Quality Framework for Wales	☐	☐	☐

5. The Framework

6. If you have read the Framework, please read the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The Framework was easy to read.	☐	☐	☐
The Framework used language that it relevant to the early years sector.	☐	☐	☐
The Framework is relevant to the work that I do.	☐	☐	☐

Comments:

[   ]

7. What do you think works well about the Framework?

[   ]

8. What do you think does not work well about the Framework?

[   ]

6. The Framework

9. Please read the following statement and tell us whether you agree or disagree with it.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Quality Framework for Wales has influenced my work.	☐	☐	☐

7. The Framework

10. Please read the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The Framework has encouraged me to focus more on monitoring children's development outcomes.	☐	☐	☐
The Framework has made me feel more confident when planning my provision.	☐	☐	☐
The Framework has encouraged me to place more emphasis on play in my work.	☐	☐	☐

Comments:

8. The Reflective Practice Toolkit

Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Reflective Practice Toolkit

The Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Reflective Practice Toolkit (Toolkit) has been developed to support individuals and teams to reflect on the quality of early childhood play, learning and care. It draws together the various requirements for delivering the type of high-quality care, education and play provision needed in Wales. Using the Toolkit should ensure we offer well-evidenced, well-informed and successful approaches to early childhood play, learning and care and help us to actively reflect on and continuously improve practice to better support all children to thrive.

11. Please read the following statement and tell us whether you agree or disagree with it.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I have heard of the Reflective Practice Toolkit	☐	☐	☐

9. The Reflective Practice Toolkit

12. How did you hear about the Reflective Practice Toolkit?

- [ ] A colleague or manager

- [ ] Welsh Government website

- [ ] Through an early years organisation that I am a member of

- [ ] Don't know

- [ ] Other (please specify):

10. The Reflective Practice Toolkit

13. Please read the following statement and tell us whether you agree or disagree with it.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I have read the Reflective Practice Toolkit	☐	☐	☐

11. The Reflective Practice Toolkit

14. If you have read the Reflective Practice Toolkit, please read the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The Reflective Practice Toolkit was easy to read.	☐	☐	☐
The Reflective Practice Toolkit used language that it relevant to the early years sector.	☐	☐	☐
The Reflective Practice Toolkit is relevant to the work that I do.	☐	☐	☐

Comments:

15. What do you think works well about the Reflective Practice Toolkit?

16. What do you think does not work well about the Reflective Practice Toolkit?

12. The Reflective Practice Toolkit

17. Please read the following statement and tell us whether you agree or disagree with it.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The Reflective Practice Toolkit has influenced my work.	☐	☐	☐

13. The Reflective Practice Toolkit

18. Please read the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The Reflective Practice Toolkit has encouraged me to focus more on monitoring children's development outcomes.	☐	☐	☐
The Reflective Practice Toolkit has made me feel more confident when planning my provision.	☐	☐	☐
The Reflective Practice Toolkit has encouraged me to place more emphasis on play in my work.	☐	☐	☐

Comments:

14. Developmental Pathways 0-3 document

Early childhood play, learning and care: Developmental pathways 0 to 3

The Early childhood play, learning and care: Developmental pathways 0 to 3, sets out a framework for ensuring quality provision for all children from birth to age 3. It focuses on what is important for children's development and how we can best support them to grow and develop in ways that suit their stage of development.

19. Please read the following statement and tell us whether you agree or disagree with it.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I have heard of the Developmental Pathways 0-3 document	☐	☐	☐

15. Developmental Pathways 0-3 document

20. How did you hear about the Developmental Pathways 0-3 document?

☐ A colleague or manager

☐ Welsh Government website

☐ Through an early years organisation that I am a member of

☐ Don't know

☐ Other (please specify):

16. Developmental Pathways 0-3 document

21. Please read the following statement and tell us whether you agree or disagree with it.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I have read the Developmental Pathways 0-3 document	☐	☐	☐

17. Developmental Pathways 0-3 document

22. If you have read the Developmental Pathways 0-3 document, please read the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The Developmental Pathways 0-3 document was easy to read.	☐	☐	☐
The Developmental Pathways 0-3 document used language that it relevant to the early years sector.	☐	☐	☐
The Developmental Pathways 0-3 document is relevant to the work that I do.	☐	☐	☐

Comments:

[ ]

23. What do you think works well about the Developmental Pathways 0-3 document?

[ ]

24. What do you think does not work well with the Developmental Pathways 0-3 document?

[ ]

18. Developmental Pathways 0-3 document

25. Please read the following statement and tell us whether you agree or disagree with it.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The Developmental Pathways 0-3 document for Wales has influenced my work.	☐	☐	☐

19. Developmental Pathways 0-3 document

26. Please read the following statements and tell us whether you agree or disagree with them.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The Developmental Pathways 0-3 document has encouraged me to focus more on monitoring children's development outcomes.	☐	☐	☐
The Developmental Pathways 0-3 document has made me feel more confident when planning my provision.	☐	☐	☐
The Developmental Pathways 0-3 document has encouraged me to place more emphasis on play in my work.	☐	☐	☐

Comments:

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20. Changes

27. Are there any potential changes to the Framework and supporting documents that you think that we should make? There is no word limit so please write as much as you like.

A Quality Framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales

The Reflective Practice Toolkit

The Developmental Pathways 0 to 3 document