Dear Neil Carmichael.

I am writing on behalf of TACTYC, the Association for Professional Development in Early Years, to congratulate you on your election as Chair of the Education Select Committee and to welcome you and the members of the Committee as you begin to scope your important role.

As advocates for high quality early education and care, with expertise in professional training and development, we have been encouraged by the Committee’s continuing interest in provision for the early years throughout the last parliament.  We would be glad to continue to contribute in this crucial area of policy, where high quality makes a critical difference to the lives of children and families not only now, but long into the future.

Our current concerns are around plans for baseline assessment when children enter primary school, coupled with simplistic views on school readiness.   In the last parliamentary term, the Committee showed strong interest in these issues, and made sure it was informed about the complex influences involved, particularly in respect of the cohort of summer-born children.  We would suggest that it would be useful to question the Secretary of State on the rationale behind the introduction of baseline assessment when she attends your committee on 9th September; as a simplistic procedure undertaken before children are settled in to their reception class cannot provide a valid or reliable measure for assessing pupils’ progress over their primary school career, it is a waste of money and will take time away from settling children in to school, which has to be the first priority.  IT would also be interesting to hear how the Secretary of State justifies making the Early Years Profile voluntary when the 8-year Study of Early Education and Development Project initiated by the DfE itself depends on data drawn from the Profile, as does the integrated review to be introduced for children around the age of two.

TACTYC is working with the Early Years Special Interest Group of the British Education Research Association (BERA EY SIG) and with the Early Intervention Foundation to raise awareness of what we know about young children’s needs – which are seen as entitlements in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – for a rounded education that promotes their physical, social and emotional development and supports their growing communication skills, in the context of a supportive family.  Current policies are undermining this, and the focus on a limited range of measurable achievement is becoming a serious threat to children‘s wellbeing, particularly in the early years.

Coupled with this, the growing emphasis on affordable childcare designed to meet the demands of employers and working parents is resulting in considerable stress on many young children.  The prime focus should be on the high quality of education and care which makes a significant contribution to children’s development; it is a false economy to over-ride the fundamental need for close contact within the family in children’s earliest months and years.

TACTYC members are very concerned about the threat to maintained nursery schools and Children’s Centres, which have a powerful record of effective support for families, especially in the most disadvantaged areas.  They also make a strong contribution to staff training and continuing professional development.  The situation has deteriorated since your predecessor, Graham Stuart, expressed concerns about this issue, and we are facing the real threat of the disappearance of the best examples of British practice.  The costs of maintained nursery schools are higher, because they are led and staffed by experts, but they contribute immeasurably to quality across the sector and are irreplaceable.  People have been coming from around the world to witness the outstanding practice here in the UK and the loss of this expertise will not be easily repaired.

Last year, TACTYC, in collaboration with BERA EY SIG, presented evidence-based proposals for early years policy development.  In addition to points directly relating to the present situation, we proposed that the government should consider:

         Extending the  EYFS to age six in order to support a better transition from early years education and care to primary (as recommended in the Cambridge Primary Review and the Rose Review) in line with the majority of developed countries;

         Applying the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile in the term when children reach statutory school age.  As it is not age-standardised, it is currently a misleading measure of developmental progress.  Its use as an indicator leads to some misdiagnosis of SEN due to expected standards that most summer born children and many boys cannot reach;

         Providing continuing access to Early Years pedagogy for any children not reaching a ‘good level of development’ at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage;

         Reinstating termly entry to the reception class in order to safeguard the interests of younger children, and to retain invaluable older role models in nursery provision;

         Financing education and care from birth to age six in line with funding for pupils from six to eighteen, and viring contributions from health and social services budgets so that universal Children’s Centre services can be reinstated; cuts are a false economy and targeted services stigmatise families and lead to reduced attendance;

         Considering the dangers inherent in delivering early childhood education and care under market conditions, which disproportionally favour the richest quintiles of the UK under-fives population in terms of service access, affordability and quality;

         Making the Phonics Check available for teachers in Y1 and Y2 to use on a voluntary basis;

         Developing multi-professional work with families from conception onwards, in line with the WAVE Report, *The First 1001 Days,* which has cross-party support;

         Ensuring that children’s views are heard and taken into account in planning, delivering and evaluating provision.

We trust that your Committee will continue to pursue its interest in early years education and care, and will be pleased to elaborate on any of the above points.

Yours sincerely,

Wendy Scott OBE

President, TACTYC