

# Responding to Primary Assessment in England Consultation Briefing from Early Excellence

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

**Closing date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2017

This consultation briefing is written for headteachers, teachers and practitioners of schools that chose to use the Early Excellence Baseline Assessment (EExAT) model.

Its aim is to share with you an overview of the consultation the Government has recently published on Primary Assessment. It also sets out some key points for consideration to help you respond to the consultation, should you wish to do so.

As a representative of a school that chose EExAT, we hope that you will continue to support a practitioner led observation-based approach to assessment which takes into account the nature of children in Reception Year. Early Excellence strongly believes that this is the best way to provide a settled and sustainable approach to on entry assessment.

Should you have any further questions about this consultation, or like any further information from Early Excellence, please contact [admin@earlyexcellence.com](mailto:admin@earlyexcellence.com).

## Background

On 30<sup>th</sup> March 2017 the Department for Education published a consultation on Primary Assessment in England. The consultation follows on from a number of changes introduced in primary education in recent years, including the new national curriculum and new statutory assessments. The Government's aim in opening this consultation is to *"work to establish a settled, trusted primary assessment system, designed to support strong educational outcomes for all children"*.

The consultation calls on anybody with an interest in early years, primary education and the way that pupils are assessed in school to respond to the consultation, including:

- Schools and school leaders, and organisations representing school leaders;
- Teachers and organisations representing school teachers;
- Governors and organisations representing governors;
- Early years providers and organisations representing them;
- Parents, carers and young people and organisations representing them;
- Organisations representing those with special educational needs and disabilities.

## What is in the consultation?

The consultation covers a number of key areas, including:

- The early years foundation stage and profile;
- Baseline assessment;
- The role of key stage 1 statutory assessments;
- School types and assessment;
- The assessment burden on schools;
- End-of-key stage statutory teacher assessment;
- Moderation.

**Early Excellence is particularly interested in the parts of the consultation which specifically relate to the re-establishment of a ‘Baseline Assessment’ for the beginning of the Reception Year, and the retention – with the possibility of modification – of the EYFS Profile.** We therefore encourage all parties interested in early years and assessment to contribute to this important Government consultation.

### **Why your response matters**

The responses that the Department for Education receive to this consultation will be used to inform the development of policies and services. It is vital that the Department receives responses from a range of organisations to ensure that different perspectives are represented. Responding to the consultation will provide a clear message to the DfE about the nature of assessment that you think is best for accountability and how this is managed in YR.

### **Early Excellence’s response**

Early Excellence issued the following statement to the media in response to the Government consultation:

Early years is vital to boosting life chances, and this is why it is important that we have a good understanding of a child’s learning and development on entry to primary school. This information is crucial for ensuring accountability and measuring the impact of early education on a child’s attainment through the school system.

We agree that this information must be fair and accurate, as well as ambitious and supportive to teachers to help every child reach their full potential. This is why we strongly believe that a practitioner led observation-based approach which takes into account the nature of children in Reception Year is the best way to provide a settled and sustainable approach to on entry assessment.

We know from our work supporting over 70% of schools to carry out baseline assessments that we must measure the factors that most strongly influence successful learning, and that we must record this in a way that allows us to accurately summarise a child’s attainment.

A formal test-based approach, such as using a tablet or pre-set questions, is unlikely to produce the information we need to truly understand the learning and development of children at this young age, and therefore unable to allow schools to be accountable.

It is important to be aware that this will be an accountability measure for Primary schools and that the principles of effective assessment for children aged Birth to 5 remain clearly defined in the statutory EYFS framework.

### **How can I respond to the consultation?**

The consultation is an online document with set questions, which can be found at: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/assessment-policy-and-development/primary-assessment/consultation/intro/>

## Points for consideration

The following section looks at each question relating to assessment in YR in the consultation and provides points for consideration when making a response.

**Q6.** The EYFSP measures a child's development against the ELGs set out in the EYFS statutory framework. Should the profile be improved to better assess a child's knowledge, skill, understanding and level of development at the end of the early years? If so, please describe which elements could be added, removed or modified.

- Consider what 'improving' the EYFSP might be taken to mean; does this point to a greater focus on formal Literacy skills? If so would this be the right direction to take it in?
- Would the EYFSP be 'improved' if the Characteristics of Effective Learning were included more explicitly?
- Although there is the recognition of the importance of Communication and Language, there is no acknowledgement of the important roles of PSED and Physical Development.
- There is significant evidence to demonstrate that good outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy are dependent on a number of aspects being in place in YR; does the EYFSP reflect this?

**Q7.** The EYFSP currently provides an assessment as to whether a child is 'emerging, expecting or exceeding' the level of development in each ELG. Is this categorisation the right approach? Is it the right approach for children with SEND?

- Do we want another change to the scoring system in the EYFSP, which would result in all previous data incompatible?
- Although there is clarity that a child who is attaining 'expected' is in line with national expectations, the 'bands' of emerging and exceeding are, by definition, potentially very wide. Does this need to be modified in order to account for the extreme variable of children's attainment at the end of YR, including children with SEND?

**Q8.** What steps could we take to reduce the workload and time burden on those involved in administering the EYFSP?

- Consider the assumptions behind this question. Is it pointing to a simplistic test approach to 'save time' instead of undertaking observations and interacting with children?
- Additionally, given the focus on formal Literacy skills and knowledge would a 'reduced workload' involve assessing only Literacy? If so, is that desirable, or do we need to reassert the importance of a holistic assessment that takes into account all aspects of learning and development, because they are all important, including the way in which they support later Literacy outcomes?
- Does the issue of 'workload' associated with the EYFSP emanate from the need for more understanding of what observational assessment is, and how it works within everyday practice?

**Q9.** How could we improve the consistency and effectiveness of the EYFSP moderation process whilst reducing burdens?

- Does this stem from a lack of understanding and consistency for the moderation process and the fact that this is an LA responsibility, challenged by current logistical circumstances?
- Does the DFE / STA need to take a clearer role in national responsibility for leading and supporting this process?
- Does there need to be more specific and helpful moderation, especially using video footage, which has been successful in the past and that this is accessible online?

**Q10.** Any form of progress measure requires a starting point. Do you agree that it is best to move to a baseline assessment in reception to cover the time a child is in primary school (reception to key stage 2)? If you agree, then please tell us what you think the key characteristics of a baseline assessment in reception should be. If you do not agree, then please explain why.

- It is worth noting that the reference to the NAHT report correctly states that this supported the idea of Baseline assessment at the beginning of YR but omits the additional fact that this also called for such an assessment to be holistic and based on observational assessment.
- Note how this links to the previous questions on regarding the EYFSP. It appears that these will both be very similar in content and methodology. This seems a very good place to reassert the importance of a holistic observational based assessment.
- Again there is a strong emphasis on specific Literacy and also Mathematics. Is it necessary here to repeat the importance of all aspects that contribute to securing later outcomes in these areas?
- There is the request for key characteristics of a new Baseline. Do you think that Prime Areas, especially including PSED and Physical Development and well as the Characteristics of Effective Learning should be part of this? Additionally, should one of the characteristics of a new Baseline assessment be that it is based on observation rather than testing? Should we also be calling for the Leuven Scales for Well Being and Involvement to be part of a Baseline assessment?

**Q11.** If we were to introduce a reception baseline, at what point in the reception year do you think it should be administered? In particular, we are interested in the impact on schools, pupils and teaching of administering the assessment at different times.

- It is important that a baseline assessment fully and accurately captures a 'starting point' so whether or not this takes place within the first half term (as with the previous policy) or later in the Reception Year.
- It is also worth pointing out that very few children start the EYFS in YR, and that accountability is much wider than this. Many Schools have a Nursery class and some even take 2 year olds – do we need to consider how accountability and 'starting points' across the whole of the EYFS can be provided for?