

This practice guide explores the importance of assessment, the different types of assessment and provides useful examples to support your practice in Wales

Supporting members to provide the highest standards of care and learning for children

This practice guidance has been developed for all professionals including childminders, nursery workers, and nannies in Wales.

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Introduction

As a childcare professional, you will be familiar with the cycle of observation, assessment and planning. Assessment is something that you do all the time when taking care of children, recording this process allows you to share children’s progress and observations with their parents, and where appropriate and with permission, other professionals.

Assessment of children is required under the [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for Children up to the age of 12 years](#) and features significantly in the CSSIW [New Inspection Framework](#). The Foundation Phase curriculum is designed to meet the needs of all children through a developmental, experiential and play-based approach to teaching and learning. First-hand experiences allow children to develop an understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. Assessment therefore of the children’s learning and development is paramount in order to plan for further growth.

What is assessment?

When we define the word “assess”, we are looking at measuring, evaluating, reviewing and judging. These are just few of the words that define how we assess young children. Many find that the term has a formal and official connotation however we would stress that any observation however small is assessed, for example when you notice a child is unable to dress themselves, you would assess this and put in place support to ensure the child becomes competent in their own personal development and effectively be able to dress themselves in the long term.

The elements of assessment consist of the five W's.

- **Why** assess?
- **What** to assess?
- **When** do we assess?
- **Where** do we assess?
- **Who** is assessed and who is involved in the process?

Once assessments of the children have been made, we need to do something with them. This is where we begin to plan and again, we can ask ourselves **Why? What? When? Where?** and with **Whom?**

Why is assessment important?

Children's early years are the most important years of their lives in terms of development and learning and it is adults who shape and support children's progress. Therefore, it is important to measure children's progress accurately so that they are supported to reach their highest potential. In Wales the [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for Children up to the age of 12 years](#) states:

"7.9 what children do is observed and recorded to help plan the next steps for the children's Play, learning and development;"

"7.10 the principles of the Foundation Phase for 3- to 7-year-olds and its seven areas of learning are understood and applied in a way appropriate to the age, abilities and stage of development of children in their care and the nature of the provision."

Assessment helps practitioners provide children with resources to stimulate their interests, motivate them and excite their curiosity, encouraging children to play and explore and learn through their experiences.

Assessment will also highlight areas of development for children who may not be progressing as expected, allowing them to get the early intervention they need.

To make sound assessments, you will need to collect a number of observations and different types of evidence, but it is the quality of these not the quantity that matters.

Types of assessment

Formative assessment

Children are being informally assessed all the time, by you and by others that care for them. As they play and develop at home, parents, carers, siblings and grandparents are all assessing without really thinking about it. They usually know exactly what their child can do and what they need to do to help them progress to the next stage of their development. They provide help for a child beginning to stand from sitting, maybe a stool or low table for the child to pull themselves up. This type of assessment is formative assessment. It is an informal ongoing process, happening all of the time through observing children, watching what they are doing and making a note of it, at least mentally, so that the child can be supported in moving forward.

By being constantly attentive to what babies and young children are doing; observing where they are choosing to play; what excites them; who they play with; what they are saying; how they move; you are finding out what children's needs are and what they can do. You are highlighting and celebrating their

achievements, however small and sharing these with their parents in a format that suits parents, you and the setting.

There is no required format for formative assessments. It is what works best for you and your setting. A mixture of professional knowledge, judgement and discussion with parents usually works best in deciding which format to use.

In Wales evidence of children's development in line with CSSIW requirements and the Foundation Phase Framework will be part of the New Inspection Framework. Inspectors will be looking for you to evidence how you use your observations and assessments to plan for each individual child's learning and development. Think about the best way to remember the details of what a child has said and done on a particular date. Dated observations show you and the parents or carers how the child is making progress between certain points in their life.

Summative assessment

The second type of assessment is summative assessment. This is a summary of all the formative assessments in order, to look at the bigger picture of where the child is in their learning and development. The summative assessments can be passed on to other settings so they have a baseline of where the child is at the time.

A summative assessment captures the child's interests, activities they've been doing, the development band they are working in and what sort of support is provided to extend their learning. A person, who does not know the child, should be able to read the summative assessment and understand immediately how the child is developing. Summative assessments are particularly important at times of transition and moving settings or rooms within a nursery. (A summative assessment on the child's needs is what you get from parents when a child is about to start their care and education with you). Assessments are often used to support a child's transition, with the permission of the child's parents you may find it helpful to aid the transition by providing the school or nursery with information which you've gathered, showing areas which you've been supporting to aid further development and enhance the opportunities available to the child to do so. To support this, the [Foundation Phase Profile](#) is a recognised system which schools are familiar with, which will raise the profile of the work you carry out and offer an informative record of the child's developmental stages.

Child Development:

As childcare professionals, we need to know and understand how children learn and develop so that the right opportunities and experiences can be provided to support and challenge them, enabling them to reach their maximum potential. During the early years children acquire new skills at quite some pace, however each child will achieve these skills at different times.

"All aspects of child development are important and should be considered as interlinked. Account also needs to be taken of barriers to play, learning and participation caused by physical, sensory, emotional, communication or learning difficulties." [Foundation Phase Profile Handbook](#)

Knowledge of developmental milestones and sequences of development can help you to understand and support children through stages of development, and to identify if there are areas where they would benefit from additional support. This, combined with your knowledge of the child and their interests, will help you to plan for opportunities to enhance their progression at their own pace, so that they can practice and master emerging skills in different ways.

We will look later on at the Foundation Phase Profile, which can be used as a tool to identify developmental milestones against some of the areas of learning in the Foundation Phase.

Children's Voice:

It is important while we are discussing planning for learning that we recognise children's right to participate in decisions and influence services, this is something that features strongly across Wales policy and will be looked at during inspections against the new inspection framework. Being able to evidence that children's voices are heard and they are able to make choices across all aspects of your service is important.

"In all aspects of their development children's own work should be respected, valued and encouraged for its originality and honesty." [Foundation Phase Profile Handbook](#)

Involving children in planning for learning can also help them develop important skills and prepare them for taking responsibility for their own learning as they grow. Ensure the child has opportunities to exercise choice, participate, get involved, and to initiate and direct their own learning over a period of time.

"As children learn new skills they should be given opportunities to plan their learning, practice their skills and transfer them to different situations across all Areas of Learning, as well as opportunities to reflect on and evaluation their learning." [Foundation Phase Profile Handbook](#)

The SMILES checklist can be used as a tool to involve children in assessing activities and planning for learning. The questions below can be used as prompts for the children to reflect on an activity, encouraging them to think more deeply about planning activities and learning, as well as reflecting on what went well, and what could be done to improve.

SMILES

Safe – was the activity safe, (safe place, safe people, Safe equipment)?

Maximum Participation – have they had maximum participation?

Involved – did all the children feel involved?

Learning – has learning taken place, what did they learn?

Enjoyment and Fun – was it enjoyable and fun, did everyone agree?

Success – did they feel that they achieved success, did everyone feel that way?

Who else is involved?

Parents can provide a valuable perspective on their child; the information they provide before a child starts in your care, and continue to provide once their child is settled with you is important. Ask parents for their views and general comments, as well as progress on any significant milestones achieved at home to support you building a broader understanding of the child in different settings and situations.

The [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for children up to the age of 12 years](#), Standard 6 states that: “Parents are kept fully involved in and informed about their child’s activities, achievement and progress.”

You should let parents and carers know how their children are learning and developing. Parents should also be aware of your duty to observe and record their child’s progress in order to plan for their next steps, this could be included in your Statement of purpose or in a separate policy.

The [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for children up to the age of 12 years](#), standard 6.6 states “any requests by third parties for information will be discussed with parents and information only shared with their consent. An exception can be made where there is a requirement to report concerns about the welfare or safety of the child; for example in relation to child protection”. Other professionals may also already be involved in a child’s life and from time to time, you may need to seek advice from them or be asked for your input in order to support a child’s developing needs. There may also be other parties with an interest in the written records and assessments that you have for a child. It is important to ensure that you have written parental permission to share these details, which makes clear with which professional and under which circumstances this would occur. These other professional could include:

- Multi-agency groups, for example, for medical, health and child protection purposes.
- Flying Start or Team around the family
- Local authorities – Foundation Phase funded places
- Local Education Authorities and regional consortia

Foundation Phase Profile

The [Foundation Phase Profile](#) can be used as a tool to support the assessment of children’s progress and skills, from the observations you have made. This is the first release under the Early Years Development and Assessment Framework (EYDAF), which aims to bring consistency across practitioners working with young children.

The Foundation Phase Profile has been developed to assess children’s abilities and development in four of the areas of learning:

- Personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity
- Language, literacy and communication skills
- Mathematical development
- Physical development

The Profile covers children’s development from six to eighty-four months (7 years of age) that are represented in outcomes starting with Bronze, Silver, Gold and progressing on through Outcomes 1 to 6. Details of the alignment of expected ages of development to the expected outcomes in the profile can be found on page 12 of the [Foundation Phase Profile Handbook](#) – observation and assessment. This therefore makes the Profile suitable to use in early years settings which will support the recording of children’s mile stones, achievements and developments and can be used with the consent of parent or carers to support the transition of a child moving to school or other childcare setting.

Developmental outcomes are presented in a selection of ‘skills ladders’ under each of these four areas of learning. The skills ladders can be used to assess children’s abilities and progress, but also helps you to identify the next level of skills that a child may be developing. This is a useful tool to support your

planning for the child's next steps, which includes opportunities for them to practice developing skills. There are a total of 43 skills ladders in the Foundation Phase Profile, however a compact version is available; often referred to as the 'Compact Profile'. The Compact Profile provides a snapshot of a child's development, and is used for the baseline assessment which is carried out on children during their first six weeks following entry to Reception class.

The Foundation Phase Compact Profile consists of 16 skills ladders including:

Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity:

- Social interaction
- Behavioural regulation
- Response to others
- Independence in personal care

Language, Literacy and Communication Skills:

- Oracy – Listening and understanding
- Oracy – Phonological awareness
- Oracy – Expressive language
- Reading – Understanding reading materials

Mathematical Development:

- Reciting and sequencing numbers
- Counting
- Shape
- Pattern

Physical Development:

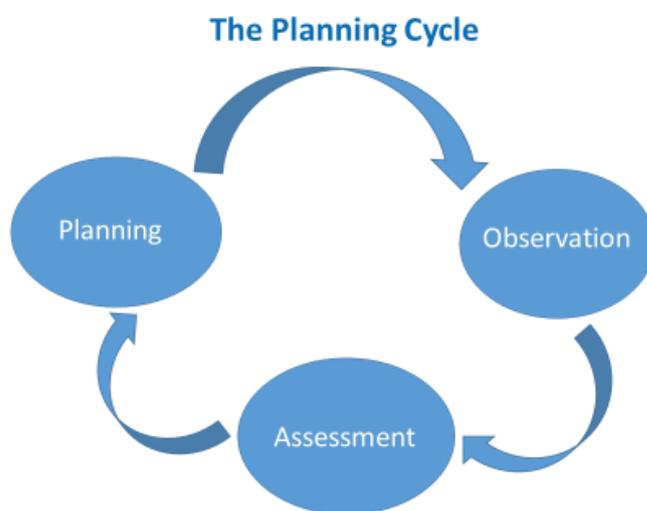
- Holding a mark-making implement
- Coordinated movement
- Drawing
- Fine manipulation

To assess whether a child has met an outcome level you should draw upon a collection of observations having seen the child demonstrate the skills in different situations on different occasions. When a child

achieves an outcome level it is because they have mastered those skills, rather than they are still developing these skills.

In order to support the process remember to:

Review, Plan, Do, Assess, Review, Plan.



Evidencing and recording judgements:

It is not a statutory requirement that those providing childcare and/or funded education in the non-maintained sector in Wales complete the Foundation Phase Profile for children in their care. However if you receive local funding for Foundation Phase or Flying Start there may be requirements around assessment of children’s development within the terms and conditions of any funding received, we suggest you check this on a local level. There is a statutory requirement for schools at reception age to use the Foundation Phase Profile.

Remember all registered childcare settings need to be able to evidence to CSSIW how they assess and plan for children’s learning and development. Currently CSSIW do not state what form of assessment should be used, the amount of evidence needed to be gathered, or the method for how the assessments are recorded. This is up to the setting to decide on what is proportionate and relative to the individual child.

When recording, ensure that you record:

- Logically and systematically, giving thought to the context
- Provide detailed, accurate and non-judgemental information
- Ensure you have parental permission
- That the evidence is kept confidential

Remember to note significant information and not to write what you already know. A mixture of both planned and incidental observations can be useful – over a period of time these collectively can cover a range of context, including adult-led and child-initiated, inside and outside, as it is important to get the environment right. You may find that you need to observe the child on a regular basis as they undertake

their activities in order to see their achievements and progression. Observing children is equally informative whether the observation takes place indoors or outdoors.

If observations are undertaken frequently and as part of the children's session/day then the children will become accustomed to practitioners observing and will continue with their play/activities. When engrossed in their work children are absorbed in the activity and may appear to be unaware of what is happening around them.

All practitioners should ensure they contribute to the observation and assessment process to ensure they have the full picture. Remember that information that information from parents and the child can support your assessment.

If you wish to use the Foundation Phase Profile to assess children's progress, there is a record form that you can complete, available from the main [Foundation Phase Profile](#) area of the Welsh Government website. Although the Foundation Phase Profile is a useful tool, you may find that any of the following form of recording works for you including:

- Foundation Phase Profile record form
- PACEY Journal
- Daily diaries
- Post it notes
- Learning journey books
- Index cards
- Record sheets
- Digital methods e.g. photographs, MP3 player, video,
- Handheld devices – photo and film clips, sound recordings and write notes

What is more important is how these observations and assessments, whichever form you use helps you plan for the child's next steps of development.

The adult's role

Everything that children do and say is part of their learning and development. You do not have to sit with a paper and pen to observe children. Observations are happening all of the time and often, the unplanned ones can be the most informative.

Effective assessments:

- have a purpose
- accurately reflect the individual learning from each child
- are approached and formatted in a way that engages young children and parents
- make a positive difference to children's continuing experiences
- recognise that all children are unique and develop at different rates and in different areas.

Practitioners need to be positive role models and offer opportunities that support the child's development to support them in becoming independent, confident learners and evidence their knowledge in child development.

Planning for Learning

All of the observation and assessment you do, will inform your planning. Think about:

- what the assessment tells you about the child ?
- how you can improve the environment so that the child's interests are catered for ?
- what activity or opportunity you could provide to extend the child's development ?
- how you can extend that child's thinking skills, physical skills and confidence ?
- how you can support children in managing their behaviour and/or making friends?

Planning is using all of this information to:

- provide a positive, quality play experience for the children in your care, giving them the opportunity to develop to their full potential.
- If the child's environment is organised with defined areas of play, they will plan their own activities and experiences.
- It is your role to make a note of how the children are accessing the areas and use these observations to improve the environment so that each child's needs are met.

When planning for children's learning and development [starting with children's interest](#) can often be a good place to begin.

Why is planning important?

Good planning is a vital part of making children's learning effective, exciting, and varied making sure that you do all you can to help them progress towards the early learning goals.

Types of planning

Instead of thinking about planning as a big thing to be tackled all at once, it might help to break it down and consider long-term, medium-term and short-term planning.

Long-term planning

When you are developing a long-term plan you should:

- Make sure the environment helps maintain children's interest and motivation and that they can choose and be independent in their play (child-initiated play).
- Provide flexible resources that can be used in many different ways.
- Be ready to change and have resources available to support and extend children's play, meeting their needs.
- Plan your continuous provision (resources, toys and equipment that are put out for children to play with) for outdoors as well as indoors.

Observe how children play in their environment, analyse the observation and make an assessment about how you can plan to develop children's knowledge, understanding and skills. Remember to link back to individual children's needs.

Medium-term planning

Medium-term planning is linked very closely to the long-term plan. It is too far into the future to be based on an individual child's needs and interests, but you may wish to have a calendar of events that links with certain key times throughout the year. For example, an overall topic or theme connected to the seasons, cultural celebrations, events and family occasions, such as birthdays or a new baby.

Short-term Planning/Daily Planning

When you are planning on a daily basis, take into account the following:

- Short-term planning should be personalised to support the learning and development of individual children.
- Children can be involved in the planning, think about the SMILES checklist mentioned earlier. Older children can be asked what resources they need. Children could be encouraged to bring resources from home, which means talking to children about the planning in advance.
- Involve the parents and carers. Home experiences and observations can link to personalised learning. Let parents and carers know what their child is doing or has taken part in.
- After each planned activity that has been based on your observations, evaluate what has taken place. Briefly assess whether it met the objective of supporting and extending the child's skills. This will inform your future planning.
- Sometimes planning will be connected to changing and providing resources. At other times it may be the involvement and the role of the adult.
- Link your planning and evaluations to the three prime and if appropriate the four specific areas of learning and development.

Activity

Take an objective look at your setting and play environment in particular. Make notes on how your provision can be improved. Have you got the resources available to meet children's interests? How do you manage this?

Take photographs of the environment and critically evaluate it. What do the children think? How could it be improved?

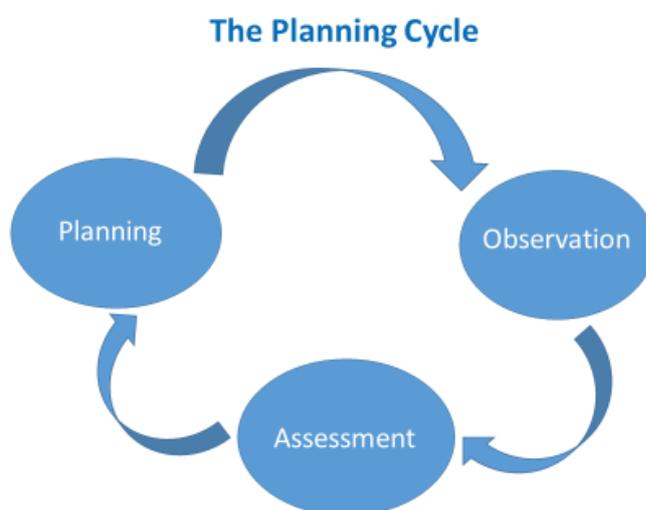
Activity

Take some time to familiarise with the [Foundation Phase Profile Handbook](#) and read through some of the skills ladders, in particular those highlighted for the Compact Profile. Start by selecting a skills ladder that fits well with your current activities and interest, and think of a child or children in your setting to focus on:

- Can you see which outcome of the ladder each child can be placed at?
- Think about what is currently being offered to support their learning in this area.
- Do you need to provide additional support to reach each outcome, or opportunities to practice these skills?
- Do you need to provide additional challenges to ensure each individual child is supported to develop to their full potential?

Summary

Observation, Assessment and Planning are an essential part of caring for children and meeting their individual needs. Your observations and assessments will help you to plan developmentally appropriate, engaging learning opportunities.



Links to PACEY Professional Standards

Here are the areas of professional standards that this practice guide relates to. Remember reading practice guides can count towards your CPD and can support you in reflecting and completing the professional standards audit tool.

PACEY Professional Standards

Member

Assessing children and planning for their learning will help you meet the standard: **C1.1 Organise activities, routines and experiences to promote children's development.**

Affiliate

Assessing children and planning for their learning will help you meet the standard: **C1.2 Organise activities, routines and experiences to promote children's development** by regularly analysing and assessing individual children's **language, behaviour and actions** in terms of their **age, gender and stage of development** and relevant benchmarks for learning and development

Fellow

Assessing children and planning for their learning will help you meet standard **6.3 Empower children to reach their full potential** by understanding and applying a wide range of relevant and up-to-date **theories of child development and childcare practice** to help make sense of children's behaviour.

References

Framework and/or Legislation

[National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for Children up to the age of 12 years](#)

[CSSIW Inspection Guide for Childminding, daycare and open Access play](#)

[Foundation Phase Framework \(Revised 2015\)](#)

[Foundation Phase Action Plan](#)

[Foundation Phase Profile](#)

Resources - websites, reading materials and books

[PACEY Planning for Learning \(Wales\) - Fact Sheet](#)

[PACEY Observations and Assessment \(Wales\) - Fact Sheet](#)

[PACEY Child Observations and Learning Journeys - Practice Guide](#)

[PACEY Foundation Phase Factsheet](#)

Support from PACEY

As a PACEY member you can get more help by visiting the website www.pacey.org.uk or by calling 0845 880 0044.

PACEY is the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years. A standard-setting organisation, we promote best practice and support childcare professionals to deliver high standards of care and learning.

Since 1977 we have provided high quality support to our members and have worked with government, local authorities and others to raise standards.

Together with our members - childminders, nannies and nursery workers - we are working to become the professional association for everyone in childcare and early years and ensure our members are recognised for the vital role they play in helping children get the best start in life.

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