



The Better Without Baseline Coalition welcomed the government's recent U-turn on Baseline Assessment, as it considered the policy both ineffective and potentially damaging to schools and children. The coalition is concerned, however, that the DfE may seek to rush through a replacement without appropriate consultation and rigour and is therefore issuing the following clarification on its own position.

The coalition believes that recent early years policy has been made with little evidence base and extremely poor levels of expert consultation. There has been scant acknowledgement of the many years of co-operative effort that went into developing the EYFS, or the strengths of current implementation including assessment. Nor has there been sufficient consideration of the implications of dropping the EYFS Profile. **We therefore strongly recommend that the current EYFS Profile be retained until there is a clear long-term and evidence-based strategy** in place that can balance governmental requirements with the real needs of the sector.

We believe that far more attention should be paid to the varied contexts of children's life experiences and opportunities and to the fact that early development is not linear - with the accompanying recognition that individual children's early development cannot be effectively measured and labeled using simplistic scores or norms.

We do not believe that young children can or should be given any kind of single developmental 'snapshot' or score. Instead early years assessments should be based upon on-going teacher observation and practice and should avoid the distraction and interruption of one-off periods of testing – especially during vital periods of transition.

Early assessments should always prioritise developmental benefit over school accountability. The coalition would like to see a transparent system established that places the onus on the DfE to justify, with clear evidence, all new policies in terms of the benefit to child development and wellbeing.

We support ongoing collaboration and research into children's learning and development and especially those aspects that best predict long-term academic achievement and well-being, i.e. oral language, play and playfulness, and self-regulation. However we believe that such research needs to be carried out over time, and as part of a comprehensive early years strategy.

We strongly contest any policy wording that emphasises children being made 'ready' for school as this perpetuates a deficit understanding of children's exceptional early learning abilities. We suggest, instead, that schools should be better supported in preparing for the varying experiences and capacities of young children.

We also strongly contest any wording that implies that learning through play is of lesser value or importance than formal teaching. Children should not have to be ready for formal teaching in order to be ready for school and the value of preschool education that focuses on learning through play should not be diminished.

England currently has one of the youngest school starting ages in the world and this means that our youngest children are already more exposed to the dangers of developmentally inappropriate pressures. **The coalition believes that much more attention should be paid to exploring whether this may be a key contributory factor to later problems in later child mental health and achievement.**