
See the NUT's views on the Early Excellence Model of Baseline Assessment

The Guardian reported on 9th June on schools' take up of the model of Baseline Assessment supplied by *Early Excellence* – a model that the article describes as being 'based on observation rather than testing'. The implication is that *Early Excellence* is not open to the same kinds of criticism as the other test providers.

The Union believes that this claim over-simplifies the issues, and does not understand how Baseline Assessment, in any of the forms approved by the government, fits into the accountability agenda and all the pressures that it involves.

The Cambridge educationalist and Too Much Too Soon Campaign advisor Dr David Whitbread writes:

“The EE model is the most similar in approach to the existing EYFS Profile, but the latter is carefully built up over time, rather than being produced within the vital settling-in period. We question in what way this is a more advantageous use of teacher's time and also question whether the huge amount of public money that is being spent on this that could have been better allocated to finding ways of increasing the quality of Early Childhood Education. We also question the government's position - that the reason for the introduction is to improve school accountability, rather than to help nurture children's ongoing development.

If the primary aim is to identify children who need extra support, we believe that all these assessments are also measuring the wrong things. There are several research studies showing that early numeracy and literacy do not predict long-term school achievement, or emotional well-being. These are predicted by early self-regulation (eg: ability to maintain attention) and by early play experience and playfulness. So, this is what we should be assessing and supporting in ECE, leaving literacy and numeracy until children are 6/7 years of age.”

The Union generally agrees with this. It would add that any form of Baseline Assessment adds to accountability pressures, and provides a poor framework for understanding and supporting children's learning.

Even the EE approach will result in children being scored – in other words a complex process of children development gets translated into a series of crude judgments. We don't yet know how these results will be compared with KS1 and KS2 results to get a measure of progress, but we suspect that what will be created in this process is a statistical artefact designed to hold schools accountable – not a helpful evaluation of children's development.

The Union says that children are more than a score. But a score is what all the Baseline Assessment models, produced on the basis of a government spec, will reduce them to. This is what the EE booklet of explanation actually says:

“When practitioners have completed their assessments and recorded their Yes/No answers on the Recording Format, this information is collated onto a digital format which produces a baseline score for each child. To meet the DfE criteria, each statement assessed must provide a score and in the EExBA the scoring is as follows:

– **The Characteristic of Effective Learning**

‘Yes’ scores 2 points, ‘No’ scores 0 points

– **The Prime Areas, Literacy & Maths**

‘Yes’ scores 1 point, ‘No’ scores 0 points.

By using this scoring mechanism it is possible to determine ‘typical’, above and below. This gives schools the baseline data for each child and the cohort as a whole. The data is then emailed to Early Excellence who submit it to the DfE for scrutiny.”

<http://earlyexcellence.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/reflect-good-baseline-assessment-practice-choose-eexba.pdf>

We have the same concerns about this procedure, and its consequences for children and schools, as we do about other models of Baseline Assessment. The dangers of labeling the child remain in place, and with them the threat of self-fulfilling prophecies. In addition, EE will reproduce the well-known, harmful effects of other testing systems: a narrowing of the curriculum, to correspond to what tests establish as important; a conception of educational development based on rising test scores; a demand that teachers – including, now, teachers in KS1, demonstrate continuous progress beyond the point identified by baseline. For anyone interested in changing, rather than perpetuating, the system of ‘accountability’ that is the plague of primary education, EE’s model has many problematic features.”

NUT, June, 2015