

# Assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings National Network Conversation 6th December 2023 Findings report



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## What was the conversation about?

This National Conversation considered the benefits, challenges, barriers, and additional support required to successfully implement the [Assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#) published July 2023.

## What did we learn?

### Benefits of the Assessment arrangements

Positive impacts for **practitioners** included:

- Celebrates the practitioner's role and how important the adult is in the early years, building self-esteem and preparing children for life-long learning.
- Less administrative pressure on practitioners and better staff well-being.
- More time with children.
- More opportunity for reflection and strengthened professional dialogue.
- Observations and assessments are more collective, and team based.
- Strengthens conversations with parents.
- Encourages practitioners to think, talk, and consider different ways of doing things.

Positive impacts for **children** included:

- Spend more time with practitioners and settle easier.
- Not pushed to prescribed outcomes and have realistic individual goals.
- Supports children to make own choices.
- Planning is child-led resulting in fulfilled, confident, and engaged children.
- Children develop skills to support lifelong learning, developing imagination, independence, and problem-solving skills earlier than previously.
- More inclusive for **all** children, including those with additional needs.
  - Easier to identify 'little steps' that still show progress.
  - A good way of including the child's voice in Person Centred Planning (PCP).
  - Celebrating progress - focusses on what a child can do rather than what they can't.
- What is being recorded about children is positive, helping build confidence.

Positive impacts for **parents** included:

- Practitioners have time to get to know the family and context introducing that into learning.
- Parent's view considered, helping build secure and trusting relationships.
- Involving parents helps extend learning into the home.
- Reporting arrangements understandable, personal and meaningful.
- Information helps parents transition their child into school or other settings.

Positive impacts on **transition and partnership working**:

- Stronger engagement with agencies and others – supported by a common language.
- Practitioner groups support consistency, dialogue and sharing of experiences.
- Relationships between settings and schools strengthened.
- Practitioner's judgments are better valued, supporting improved professional dialogue.

### Barriers and challenges

Barriers or challenges impacting on **practitioners** included:

- Time available to understand new arrangements.
- Lack of confidence (without firm leadership) prompts a return to 'tried and tested' ways.
- Retention of practitioners impacts on knowledge, experience, and expertise.

Barriers or challenges identified relating to **children** included:

- Children who have become used to having tasks/activities set up are taking time to create their own learning.
- Children who attend infrequently may not access a broad experience.
- High levels of children with emerging needs (post pandemic).

Barriers or challenges identified relating to **parents** included:

- Not understanding the purpose of assessment - questioning 'when is my child going to be able to read or write their name?'

**Other factors** identified as barriers or challenges:

#### Professional learning (PL)

- Some practitioners unaware that all PL documentation is available on Hwb.
- Variation in delivery of support and PL between local authorities.
- Some qualifications do not align with the curriculum or assessment arrangements.
- Time for professional dialogue and PL.
- More examples of effective practice required.

#### Consistency

- Inconsistent messaging from external organisations can be confusing.
- Separate arrangements for children 3-5 and those aged 0-3. How do they connect?
- Myths and misunderstanding occasionally spread leading to inconsistent practice.
- Schools and Flying Start settings more data-driven and do not align.

## How will we take this learning forward?

The conversation identified areas where Welsh Government might prioritise future activity, such as raising practitioner confidence, PL, supporting professional dialogue, and engagement and communication.

We encourage other organisations, which have an interest in the delivery of quality nursery education, and settings themselves to consider the actions they might also take.

As a result, for future activity we will:

- Develop a suite of PL materials to support the implementation of Assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings, including:
  - examples of effective observation and assessment practice,
  - how to effectively analyse observation information,
  - exemplars demonstrating how to write effective assessments, and
  - effective planning in practice.
- Ensure any assessment PL offered is suitable and adequately covers the elements settings are identifying as 'key', such as:
  - responsive planning,
  - child-led learning, and
  - observations.
- Work with partners to understand barriers or challenges to extending local authority or consortia support to all funded practitioners, and how these could be overcome.

- Work with partners to understand what additional support might be required for managers and leaders and how this could be taken forward.
- Work with further and higher education institutes to introduce consistency in early education course content, in line with current arrangements.
- Ensure greater promotion of Hwb, including access arrangements, availability of materials for parents/carers, learning/teaching materials and PL resources.
- Work with partners to ensure messages relating to curriculum and assessment arrangements are consistent.

In line with previous approaches taken to develop and implement curriculum and assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings we will work with our partners to ensure that future development work supports effective practice.

As ever, we are continually grateful to our partners for their positive engagement and commitment and for the excellent support they have provided to ensure this National Network Conversation helps strengthen future arrangements.