

# Quality assurance of early years foundation stage profile data

## Who should use this guidance?

This guidance is for early years foundation stage (EYFS) practitioners, headteachers and local authorities.

## Purpose of quality assurance

“The usefulness of data is entirely dependent on its accuracy. Practitioners, school managers, setting leaders and local authorities have... responsibilities in ensuring the quality, accuracy and reliability of data.”<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of quality assurance in relation to EYFS profile data is to ensure that all stakeholders who use the data have accurate, truthful and reliable information that can be used to improve outcomes for all children.

Developing a process that supports effective quality assurance takes time and commitment from all stakeholders. It also requires trust and cooperation at all levels, working collaboratively with mutual respect and understanding of the EYFS profile.

## Purpose of the EYFS profile

“The primary purpose of the EYFS profile is to provide year 1 teachers with reliable and accurate information about each child’s level of development as they reach the end of the EYFS...”<sup>2</sup>

The EYFS profile produces data that can be used for a variety of purposes, such as supporting each child’s individual learning journey, identifying needs of specific groups of learners and evaluating the effectiveness of classroom provision. However, its primary purpose is to enable year 1 teachers to plan an appropriate, relevant and challenging curriculum based on the needs of each individual child.

## Principles of effective quality assurance

### Accurate evidence of scale point judgements

Evidence supporting judgements must be accumulated over a period of time, and from a

range of contexts showing the child’s ownership, understanding and application of the particular knowledge and/or skill being assessed.

The majority of evidence should come from the practitioner’s knowledge of the child and observation of the child’s self-initiated activities.

Detailed guidance on the process of how scale point assessments and judgements should be made can be found in the Early years foundation stage profile handbook.<sup>3</sup>

### Regular attendance at moderation events

Schools, settings and the local authority should take responsibility to organise moderation events to ensure consistency of judgements using national exemplification materials. The events might take the form of:

- a moderation visit to the school by the local authority
- in-school moderation, learning community or cross-county events
- EYFS profile training events organised by the local authority.

### Embedding systems in effective early years pedagogy

In order to make scale point judgements, the characteristics of effective environments that enable children to demonstrate knowledge, skills and understanding consistently and independently need to be understood.

<sup>1</sup> *Early years foundation stage profile handbook*, page 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Early years foundation stage profile handbook*, page 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Early years foundation stage profile handbook*, pages 9–10, ‘Finalising the judgements’.

### All stakeholders should understand the EYFS profile

It is the professional responsibility of all parties involved in gathering or using data to have an understanding of the EYFS profile and the processes through which the data is produced. This applies to year 1 teachers in particular.

The level of understanding will depend upon the degree to which the stakeholder is involved. An EYFS practitioner will obviously have in-depth knowledge, but a subject leader will need to be informed about the meaning of the data for subject development.

### Headteachers should review component level data

Headteachers and governing bodies should analyse the final data for quality assurance before it is sent to the local authority. Before comparisons at this level can be made available, a general review of data must be submitted to the local authority by the headteacher. Local authorities, headteachers and governing bodies have a specific moderating duty to "quality assure the resulting data to ensure it is an accurate reflection of children's attainment"<sup>4</sup>.

### Accurate entry of data

The practitioners who made the original EYFS profile judgements should also check and amend the entries. Providing a quiet work room, free from disturbance, with specific time allocated, is the most effective practice.

Understanding and recognition of common input errors is vital, and clear guidance from the local authority to schools on how the data should be formatted and submitted is essential.

### Data/statistics teams and EYFS profile moderation managers should work closely together

Support staff collating EYFS profile data must conduct their work in a manner that is fully approved and understood by the EYFS profile moderation manager. Absence of such cooperation may result in inappropriate collation of data, misunderstandings that can lead to mistaken interpretation, and the need to repeat processes.

### Local authorities should respond to schools' initial submission of data before the end of the summer term

This enables the earliest possible comparison between the school's initial data and local authority findings. The response itself should comprise

an analysis, preferably supported by graphical illustration, showing the comparison.

### Local authorities, headteachers and governing bodies must comply with their specific moderation duties

As outlined in *Assessment and reporting arrangements 2009*.

### Effective use of EYFS profile data

"Practitioners should ensure judgements truthfully and accurately reflect the picture of each child's attainment gained from the insights pooled over time by all professionals, agencies, parents and children involved in the process."<sup>5</sup>

It is important that data at individual component level should be considered as well as accumulative point scores.

### The EYFS practitioner should use the data to:

- reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of his or her provision across the six areas of learning and whether the learning environment is based on effective early years pedagogy
- consider whether a sufficient amount of time is planned for children to participate in independent learning
- plan more opportunities for carrying out observations and ensuring that networks of points accredited to individual children make sense
- identify continuing professional development areas for self and support staff
- review how parents and children actively contribute to the observation and assessment process.

Practitioners may find the following questions useful when moderating evidence within a setting, or with other settings.

- Are judgements consistent and accurate?
- Has a range of evidence – predominantly from observation of child-initiated activities – been used to support judgements?
- Is evidence supporting a child's attainment of a particular scale point appropriate?
- How does the evidence match scale point criteria?
- Are scale points interrogated closely to ensure that all elements are actually achieved?

<sup>4</sup> *Assessment and reporting arrangements 2008*, page 16

### Year 1 practitioners should have a sound understanding of the EYFS profile and use the data to:

- plan an appropriate and challenging curriculum based on the interests and needs of the unique group of children transferring each year to key stage 1
- identify areas where individual children need more support and ways that this can be achieved
- identify groups of learners with similar patterns of attainment, which can indicate starting points for learning in year 1 for that cohort
- explore whether any of the children need a greater challenge and how this might be provided
- check if there are groups of learners who are not achieving specific scale points; investigate whether this is a result of provision and also what steps are being taken to address this deficit
- examine if there are differences between boys' and girls' achievements, or those of other groups such as children learning English as an additional language, with special educational needs or from minority groups
- explore whether differences in achievement between groups indicate a need for greater support for any specific group of children
- continue to liaise regularly with the EYFS team to review children's progress.

### The headteacher should use the data to:

- facilitate internal moderation and external training
- examine how each year's data set compares with that of previous cohorts
- ensure that the curriculum in year 1 is responsive to children's needs and conducive to their learning styles
- identify strengths and areas for development within staffing, budget, access to outdoor space, continuing professional development (CPD), resources, intervention programmes in year 1, physical environment, use of support staff
- inform school improvement planning
- check the impact of whole school initiatives, for example, raising levels of achievement in boys' writing.

The headteacher should sign off component level data (not accumulated scores) and send it to the local authority after checking there are no input errors and that he or she is confident that the data is an accurate reflection of the attainment of the cohort.

It must be emphasised in the strongest possible terms that the suppression, enhancement or manipulation of EYFS profile data is a self-defeating exercise. Inaccurate data is meaningless and will lead to misinformation about the school being held by the local authority, Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) and Ofsted.

In addition, Headteachers will find themselves increasingly unable to discuss patterns of attainment with confidence and credibility where these do not match outcomes observed within the classroom.

It is currently not possible to use EYFS profile data to calculate a numerical statement of 'value added' during the EYFS year. This exercise would not take into account the child's individual starting point or the fact that each child learns at a varying rate and pace that may fluctuate across the year according to many factors. Neither is it possible to make predictions about children's future attainment as there is no correlation between EYFS profile data and key stage 1 or 2 outcomes or national curriculum levels.

### Establishing a quality assurance system

To establish an effective quality assurance system, stakeholders must first be familiar with the underlying process, since this will enable them to undertake the necessary functions effectively.

To ensure that accurate data is submitted to DCSF, the quality assurance process must be completed by the end of the summer term. Schools must be informed well in advance during the relevant year about local authority expectations regarding the accuracy of data and what the local authority is able to provide in return.

The local authority might usefully provide this information to headteachers and practitioners at spring term conferences. These would look back on the previous year, make comparisons with national data outcomes and inform settings about upcoming

<sup>5</sup> Early years foundation stage profile handbook, page 7.

quality assurance procedures. There must be clear recognition by schools of the format and presentation of the data required by the local authority.

### General guidelines for the local authority

Local authorities should set aside time, personnel and funding to enable establishment of an effective quality assurance system, trial this system before 'going live' and ensure the full support of the statistical analysis team. Larger local authorities could consider identifying a manageable and statistically valid sample, for example:

- schools with a reasonably-sized cohort
- a combination of rural/inner city catchment areas incorporating all localities
- a variety of differently-sized schools.

This would enable them to draw on a range of comparisons to further enhance analysis of the data. Other groupings might include:

- schools with newly qualified EYFS teachers
- schools with an Ofsted inspection due
- schools not being externally moderated
- schools with an insecure outcome from a previous moderation visit
- Intensive Support Programme schools.

The combined knowledge of school improvement partners (SIP), local authority advisers and early years advisers will be vital in this process to establish if the data is in line with expectations for a school.

### Recommended procedures for the local authority

- Set a date for the collection of school data for submission to the local authority no later than six working days before the end of June. This allows time to identify schools that have not sent in data on time. Each local authority should have a format based on internal systems and DCSF requirements.
- Allocate the following week for informed local authority personnel to review and respond in writing to the schools. In order to save time a standardised response format could be prepared in advance covering topics such as:

- comparison of school data with local authority results
- gender ratios
- percentages of children who have achieved specific scale points.
- Allow time for the school to respond in turn to queries raised by the local authority (for example, the setting cohort might have a significant number of children with language delay and therefore may need to reassess data).
- Establish a system for the headteacher to sign off any altered data before sending it to the local authority.
- Ensure that data teams do not begin to enter the data into systems until all data is available.
- Ensure that school improvement partners, primary advisers and early years advisers are trained and involved in the quality assurance process and assist in reviewing data.
- Ensure that effective cluster systems of schools are in place to facilitate moderation and that quality assurance is applied to any subsequent groupings.
- Ensure that the autumn data pack reaches schools at the earliest opportunity.
- Identify schools where the school practitioner judgements are regarded as unreliable, and put support systems in place.

### Points to consider for quality assurance of EYFS profile data

Each child will achieve a different pace of progress, depending on his or her starting point and other factors that will cause fluctuations in his or her learning rate.

The size of cohort must also be considered. Accordingly, when looking at data, one should be looking for trends and links between the EYFS profile scales indicating whether the child uses his or her knowledge, skills and understanding in practical applications.

The following general comparisons should be made to identify any inconsistencies in attainment of assessment scales.

- Achievement of Linking sounds and letters (LSL) against Reading (R) and Writing (W).

- Numbers as labels and for counting (NLC) against Calculating (C) – it is unlikely that a child could achieve scale point 8 in one of these scales and not the other.
- Achieving scale point 2 or 3 in some scales and 8 or 9 in others – such an anomaly is not impossible but would merit further investigation and verification as well as an explanatory dialogue with the year 1 teacher.
- Knowledge and understanding of the world (KUW) and Creative development (CD) against Language for communication and thinking (LCT) – if a child does well in LCT, he or she is likely to do well in KUW 5 and 6 or CD 7 and 8 as these scale points also involve using reasoning language, clarification and explanation of ideas.
- Physical development (PD) against Writing (W).
- The three personal, social and emotional development (PSED) scales against all other scales – if a child does well on these, especially Dispositions and attitudes (DA), he or she is likely to have a good level of achievement in most other scales.

### Networks of scale points

There are many links threading through the EYFS profile. Seeing them will bring coherence to the assessment process and enable practitioners to better capture the nature of each child's learning.

Practitioners are advised to consider the links between scale points. The information below indicates possible networks and the likelihood of links between scale points. It does not list all

possible networks, and should not be used as a cross-reference checklist where the attainment of one scale point would automatically indicate attainment of all the other scale points linked to it.

Practitioners should keep in mind the guidance relating to assessment of children with English as an additional language. Scale points 4-9 of the communication, language and literacy (CLL) scales need to be assessed in English; all other scales and scale points can be assessed in a child's home language.

### Lines of enquiry

The following questions are the basis of the quality assurance process.

- Does the school's data reflect knowledge/expectation of the cohort?
- Is there a difference in data where there is a two-form entry?
- Are year-on-year trends significantly higher/lower than previous years?
- What is the cause of anomalies?
- Is the school's data significantly/unexpectedly adrift from the local authority data?
- If scale points 1 to 3 are not completed prior to achievement of any of points 4 to 8, or if scale point 9 is achieved ahead of any others – what is the cause?
- Are there patterns within the cohort of specific scale points not being achieved?

### Personal social and emotional development scales

#### Disposition and attitudes (DA), social development (SD) and emotional development (ED)

- DA scale points underpin all the other scales. Points 1–9 embody the skills required for learning: interest, excitement, perseverance, confidence, motivation, independence, involvement, engagement, participation and the ability to concentrate.
- DA 6 is dependent upon ED 4 because being interested and excited is an example of an appropriate response.
- SD 6 is interlinked with ED 5, 7 and 8 because it is the application of dispositions to a social situation or a group. Therefore it is likely that these scale points will be achieved at similar times.
- ED 5 will be a key indicator for the attainment of ED 6, 7 and 8.

## Communication, language and literacy scales

### Language for communication and thinking (LCT), linking sounds and letters (LSL), reading (R) and writing (W)

- LCT impacts on progress across all six areas of learning. This is especially true of scale points 3, 4, 6 and 7. Reflecting, modifying, asking questions, imagining, organising and clarifying thinking are key prerequisites for learning. Similarly, listening, responding, awareness of listener, interaction, negotiation, taking turns and conversation are fundamental to effective communication.
- A child who is applying the skills involved in LCT 3 (plan, do, review) shows evidence of the process of learning.
- LCT 4 builds on scale point 3 and links with knowledge and understanding of the world (KUW) 8 and creative development (CD) 8, which concern the expression and communication of ideas, thoughts and feelings.
- LCT 5 links with CD 7.
- LCT 6 links with CD 3, CD 7 and CD 8.
- LCT 7 links SD and ED, both of which focus on forming positive relationships, awareness of others and taking turns.
- LSL 3 is a prerequisite for W 3.
- LSL 4, 5, 6 are prerequisites for W 7.
- LSL 5, 6, 7 are prerequisites for R 6.

## Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy scales

### Numbers as labels and for counting (NLC), calculating (C) and shape, space and measures (SSM)

- NLC 3 and NLC 6 lead to C 3, 4 and 5 and C 7 because calculation operations make more sense if your counting is secure.
- Mental maths and investigative maths support children applying knowledge from previous scale points in counting, and applying knowledge in calculating.
- SSM 4–7 link to LCT as they focus upon children understanding and applying appropriate language and bringing it into their play.
- NLC 8, C 8 and SSM 8 all relate to problem solving and thus are linked to LCT.

## Knowledge and understanding of the world (KUW)

- KUW 4 links to DA 7, LCT 7, W 6 and CD 7-8.

## Physical development (PD)

- PD 5 and PD 7 link to W 5.

## Creative Development (CD)

- Children will need to achieve CD scale points 1–6 in order to achieve CD 7 or 8 since these are a composite of the previous points.
- Children will need to achieve CD 5 prior to CD 8 as these experiences will inform their decisions about tools and resources.

## Quality assurance in action: case studies

The following case studies from two local authorities, Havering and North Lincolnshire, illustrate the importance of ensuring data from EYFS profiles is properly quality assured. Please note both case studies refer to foundation stage profile (FSP) data, since they pre-date the introduction of EYFS profiles, but the rationale behind the projects and the actions taken to improve quality assurance are equally valid for EYFS profile data.

### Case study 1: Quality assurance at the London Borough of Havering

#### Background

In spring/summer 2006, the Havering early years team decided to change their system of collecting foundation stage profile (FSP) data. The existing system only collected cumulative scores, which meant they were unable to 'drill down' to scale point-level data to gain greater insight. They knew it was possible to get data at this level but understood that it was important to secure the support and understanding of practitioners, schools and the local management of schools (LMS) team.

The change was explained to headteachers and early years coordinators at Havering's annual early years conference in the spring term. This was followed by training for practitioners, headteachers and administration staff.

In the summer term schools recorded individual point score data using the Assessment Manager system. This was sent electronically to the local authority, who automatically calculated cumulative scores to send to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

The usual FSP data analysis in September 2006 produced cumulative scores that appeared to show normal scoring and good attainment across all assessment scales, but examination of individual point score data highlighted several anomalous results. The schools concerned were contacted and a series of issues identified, primarily concerning data review and entry.

In some cases schools had not checked the original data inputted into Assessment Manager before submission. In others, headteachers had not reviewed the data prior to submission. The net result was that the data was not as secure as the

cumulative scores would seem to indicate. At this time Havering was discussing setting FSP outcomes targets with the DCSF, therefore assuring the quality of data submitted took on far greater significance.

#### What happened next?

- Havering used the same data collection process for spring/summer 2007. This time the annual early years conference outlined not only the 2006 findings, but also introduced the proposed changes to the process, relating to quality assuring data.
- After training, all schools sent their FSP data to Havering electronically in June, but slightly earlier than before.
- Havering's assessment adviser collated local authority cohort data against individual school data. The results were passed to the early years adviser who in turn identified trends, school attainment against borough-wide norms, and anomalies in data from individual schools.
- The analysis was sent to each headteacher to review and change if necessary; 44 per cent of schools changed their data.
- Headteachers signed off the amended data and gave it to the local authority statistics team for transmission to the DCSF. It was also given to Havering's school improvement team to inform discussions in their autumn term visits.

#### Benefits and lessons learned

The prime benefit is that Havering now has far greater confidence that the data going to DCSF is correct. This in turn has enabled Havering to write detailed action plans against the DCSF outcomes targets.

The key steps in achieving this included getting schools to submit data earlier and giving Havering more time to collate, analyse and provide feedback to schools. Also providing a detailed analysis of initial data for each school enabled review of anomalous outcomes that could then be changed.

There are other benefits. Schools are making greater use of FSP data to support judgements in their self evaluation form, while headteachers have improved engagement with and understanding of FSP data.

Havering's early years team is now better able to target support to individual schools with unusual

data and/or significant under achievement in specific scale points. They can also analyse attainment of all key groups of children and target support for specific groups.

### Case study 2: North Lincolnshire data quality assurance pilot 2008

#### Background

A unitary authority, North Lincolnshire's schools range from large inner-urban primaries to small rural schools where cohort numbers can be in single figures. Managing FSP moderation is the responsibility of two early years advisory officers. One manages the moderation process, the other leads on data analysis and interpretation for schools and for the local authority.

North Lincolnshire had access to data at scale point level for individual schools since the introduction of FSP, due to schools' use of the eProfile, which the local authority supports with training. This is run jointly by the school's IT service and moderation managers and includes drop-in sessions and access to a telephone helpline.

A system for feeding back data analysis and interpretation to schools is already well developed. The moderation managers also lead FSP data analysis sessions with schools in September each year during which further contextual and comparative information is provided and discussed. As a result schools make greater use of eProfile data, and headteachers are more confident and better informed as they approach school development planning, school improvement partner conversations and Ofsted inspections.

#### The 2008 quality assurance pilot

The internal eProfile verification process enables many entry errors to be identified and corrected at source, but there are still scores that represent anomalous outcomes.

The goals of the 2008 quality assurance pilot were to identify and amend these errors, and ensure that headteachers authorise data submitted by schools.

- Schools were sent comprehensive guidance notes in May 2008 on entering FSP data into the eProfile and scrutinising outcomes for anomalies and errors.
- Schools submitted data to the LA by 23 June (a week earlier than in previous years) using the eProfile and electronic transfer system.

- North Lincolnshire's research and information team validated the data to check that it fulfilled requirements for submission to DCSF and that an FSP existed for each child who should have one.
- FSP moderation managers scrutinised each school's outcomes and prepared a short report, focusing on attainment of particular groups (for example boys/girls) and comparison with 2007 outcomes. They also looked for unusual patterns of attainment to discuss with schools as direct queries.
- The reports, along with any direct queries about specific results, were returned to each school during the first week in July.
- After reviewing the reports, headteachers were asked to complete a pro-forma declaring that the data represented an accurate picture of FSP outcomes for that school. Data was not accepted for submission to DCSF until this declaration was received by the moderation managers.
- Additional data feedback, including the local authority-wide picture and full contextual analysis, will continue to be presented at training sessions in September 2008.

As a result of this pilot, North Lincolnshire now has much greater certainty that data returned to the DCSF is an accurate picture of outcomes. The moderation team is able to explore anomalies in results with individual schools and target extra support if necessary. Schools also gain a better picture of their attainment.

### Conclusion: the benefits of quality assuring data

Developing a process that supports effective quality assurance takes time and commitment from all stakeholders, but it does produce benefits that justify the effort.

#### Benefits for the child

- The child accesses a planned environment which has his or her needs and interests accurately identified and at its core.

#### Benefits for the parent

- The parent actively contributes to the assessment process and is fully informed.

- Provision in year 1 will be based on an accurate picture of their child's attainment, and starting points for future learning.

### **Benefits for the school**

- The school obtains increased understanding and ownership of its own data, which provides an opportunity to reflect on the quality of EYFS practice and provision.
- Ofsted self-evaluation forms are based on a true picture of the school, and the headteacher's ability to have an informed discussion with Ofsted is increased.
- Dialogue with school improvement partners and wider school development planning is facilitated, since data analysis identifies improvement issues and provides a basis for setting realistic but challenging targets.
- There is accurate identification of attainment of specific groups of children as they go into year 1. For example, children with English as an additional language or with special educational needs, or by gender, attendance etc.
- Pupil progress meetings with parents are informed by accurate data.

### **Benefits for the local authority**

- The early years outcomes duty is based on reliable and accurate data, which in turn informs discussions with partners such as National Strategy, regional government office and Together4Children.
- The local authority has a reliable database from which to plan intervention programmes and prioritise topics for training/conferences.
- School improvement partners and advisers can have confidence in the schools' data provided to them and are able to ask challenging questions.