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# An independent stocktake of the Foundation Phase in Wales

## Final report

September 2013 – March 2014



Leading education  
and social research  
Institute of Education  
University of London

# An independent stocktake of the Foundation Phase in Wales

## Overview

This document reports on the findings and recommendations from an independent stocktake of the Foundation Phase, led by Professor Iram Siraj, who looked at how the Foundation Phase in Wales is being implemented on the ground and how it can be strengthened in the future.

## Action required

None – for information only.

## Further information

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# 1. Executive summary

*1.1. The Stocktake Process and aims:* This independent Stocktake of the implementation of the Foundation Phase, chaired by Professor Iram Siraj, was commissioned by Huw Lewis (Minister for Education and Skills) from September 2013 until March 2014. The Stocktake included four methods of gathering evidence and validating findings (see Table 2 on page 16). First, a Task and Finish Group which included experts and key stakeholders from across Wales; second, visits to good and excellent maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings (total 11, in the North and South of Wales); third, six focus groups (total attendees: 67 stakeholders, including practitioners from maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings other than those visited); and finally a series of questionnaires distributed across the sector (total completed: 75). The aims of the Stocktake were agreed and laid out in the terms of reference:

- Understand how well the Foundation Phase is being implemented across Wales
- Clarify how language development, literacy and numeracy skills are embedded across all Areas of Learning (AOLs) in both maintained and funded non-maintained settings across the whole age range
- Gauge how well the Foundation Phase addresses raising the quality of learning for children subject to socio-economic deprivation
- Establish how and when children enter the Foundation Phase and how progression, particularly from Flying Start to the Foundation Phase and then to Key Stage 2, is or can be demonstrated
- Identify where there is variability in quality focussing on leadership, workforce and the experience of the child
- Establish how well the Foundation Phase principles and requirements are embedded in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and on-going Continued Professional Development (CPD)
- Make recommendations for improvement.

The Stocktake focussed on the implementation of the Foundation Phase across Wales and within different Foundation Phase providers looking closely at aspects that might inform future policy. We considered the detail of how the Foundation Phase supported individual children's learning, their families and communities as well as aspects of leadership, qualifications, training, standards and transitions.

*1.2. International context:* Wales has engaged in an ambitious quality improvement process introducing the Foundation Phase gradually over the last ten years. Many of the processes and strategies introduced to support the implementation of the Foundation Phase have been evidence based, and the underpinning pedagogy and practice within the Foundation Phase are known to have a positive impact on teachers' and practitioners' practice and lead to improvements in the quality of provision for children and their families (Sylva et al, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2006). The focus on improving the lives of children and families in poverty through supporting the learning and teaching of young children is also well evidenced and is particularly important for Wales (Siraj-Blatchford and Sira-Blatchford, 2010; DfES, 2013a). However, for the implementation of the Foundation Phase to be effective in Wales, it requires a fundamental change in culture within many of the maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings engaged with it, which will take time to embed (Mitchell and Cubey, 2003). UNESCO (2004) considered quality improvements of this type across the world and concluded that they not only require a strong lead from government with a robust long term vision but also require sufficiently motivated and well supported staff. Further, they noted that the impact of an education policy may not be apparent until several years after its implementation. Finally, they warned that one policy can never be viewed in isolation to other policies and trends.

*1.3. Welsh context:* The findings of this independent Stocktake are in line with UNESCO's (2004) conclusions (see section 1.2). The implementation of the Foundation Phase is variable within and between maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings, however there appears to be a general move in the right direction with this very complex change and process. The Monitoring and Evaluation of the Effective Implementation of the Foundation Phase (MEEIFP) Project Across Wales suggested that 10% of the pilot Foundation Phase settings were implementing the Foundation Phase well at that time (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2006). Although not directly comparable, it is interesting to note that the stakeholders in the Foundation Phase Stocktake Task and Finish Group estimated that approximately one fifth of all maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings were implementing the Foundation Phase very successfully currently.

In order to support the Welsh improvement process further the Stocktake has compiled a list of 23 recommendations. These recommendations impact on Wales and the Foundation Phase at all levels including countrywide and consortia level strategic leads, head teachers, other leaders within maintained schools and non-maintained settings, class teachers, practitioners, advisors, inspectors and training institutions. Before considering the complete list (on pages 8 to 11) the following three sections concentrate on first, recommendation 1: supporting a ten year strategic plan; second, recommendations which consider training and support for teachers and practitioners in the Foundation Phase; and third, 10 main short-term priorities as these are seen to be key areas of reform.

*1.4. Recommendation 1: supporting a ten year strategic plan:* To support the Welsh improvement process further a longer term strategic plan of not less than ten years could be devised and monitored by an implementation group of key Foundation Phase experts from across and beyond Wales. The experts would need to be knowledgeable about the key issues related to the Foundation Phase experiential and play based pedagogy, standards and how young children develop and learn. They would benefit from having in depth knowledge of early childhood education and systems within and beyond Wales as well as the ability to understand and interpret research and evaluation evidence.

In order to gather a strategic planning group together and move it forward an initial scoping exercise to consider the remit and ensure that the right representatives with sound expertise are present would be advisable (Appendix 3 provides some examples of possible members). As well as acting as a strategic planning group, the key Foundation Phase experts should be a conduit for all Foundation Phase changes, planning and evaluations. They would refer to *Foundation Phase Framework for Children's Learning for 3 to 7 year-olds in Wales (DCELLS, 2008)* as their main framework of reference. Their first major piece of work would be the prioritisation of the recommendations (from the Stocktake and other reviews and evaluations) followed by co-ordinating and monitoring the changes. In addition, as part of the improvement process, they should have a remit for communication and build a strategy to ensure that all Foundation Phase staff and stakeholders are aware of the ten year strategic plan, how it is progressing and what that will mean for them in their unique position over time.

*1.5. Recommendations targeting training and support.* There are a large number of recommendations which relate directly to the training and support of heads, teachers and practitioners within the Foundation Phase. This reflects the understanding that by enhancing the quality of teaching, rather than concentrating purely on structural changes, increases in all children's achievements are likely to result (Hopkins, 2013). Specifically training and support should be 'fit-for-purpose' for its target audiences, include some guidelines on how the Foundation Phase sits with other current policy directions, such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF), as well as broaden its remit to include all leaders (at consortia as well as maintained schools and funded non-maintained setting level), Key Stage 2 staff and all non-maintained settings. Certain areas of practice need to be strengthened including leadership skills, reflective practice and understanding how best children learn and develop. Teachers and practitioners need to understand the effects of disadvantage and the importance of the home learning environment and supporting transitions. A greater emphasis should be placed on linking theory and research to adult pedagogy across all training modules. Clear models and examples of practice within the Foundation Phase across the sector need to be identified, available and accessible (possibly adding information and training to a bespoke Foundation Phase website).

1.6. *The 23 recommendations*: The recommendations have been divided into two lists. First, 10 short-term priorities on pages 6 to 8 followed by a complete list of 23 recommendations in Table 1, pages 9 to 12. The recommendations are presented in the order in which they appear in the following sections of the report. They link to the sections headed Findings and Recommendations where the rationale for effective practice, the context in Wales and identified issues are outlined and discussed before the specific recommendations are noted.

### **Stocktake Recommendations for the Welsh Government:**

Main short-term priorities:

- **Appoint a strategic group of Foundation Phase experts from across and beyond Wales to take a strategic and long term planning role within the Foundation Phase. To devise a ten year plan to support the next steps in the implementation and consolidation of the Foundation Phase:**
  - **using the Foundation Phase Framework for Children’s Learning for 3 to 7 year-olds in Wales (DCELLS, 2008) as a guide.**
  - **taking forward key recommendations from current evaluations, reviews and this Stocktake.**
  - **developing an effective communication strategy for across Wales.**
  - **acting as a conduit for all Foundation Phase changes, planning and evaluations.**
  
- **Consider current inspection processes and procedures, including making some changes in legislation in order to bring together Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn) inspections into one joint inspection process involving both inspectorates that is delivered across the Foundation Phase (3-7 age group). This should ensure that the inspections of all providers of the Foundation Phase (serving children aged 3 – 7) would be comparable. Note: In primary schools there should still be one inspection but with an inclusion of CSSIW type quality being added to the team and Foundation Phase reported alongside the Key Stage 2 inspection.**
- **Identify settings/schools of excellence to support continued professional development (CPD) and training of all staff. Identify methods of sharing best practice between maintained schools and all non-maintained settings and vice versa.**

- **Consider compulsory training for leaders' across the sector including strategic leaders in the Country, consortia, primary head teachers, advisory staff, leaders of funded non-maintained settings and services to support their understanding of the principles and practices of the Foundation Phase. The training should be bespoke to the audience taking into account their history and previous experiences and include research showing how effective implementation of the Foundation Phase can support standards and impact on social and economic growth generally.**
- **Consider supporting progression and continuity throughout the Foundation Phase by developing some additional training and guidance to the LNF on practice in language, literacy and numeracy for 3 and 4 year olds, ensuring this is appropriate for these children. It should follow their individual learning and development needs, and fit with the experiential Foundation Phase philosophy and practice.**
- **Continue to develop (through the Early Years Development and Assessment Framework (EYDAF)) and then implement an assessment profile which takes into account practitioners' skills. Ensuring that this profile continues throughout the Foundation Phase (ages 3-7) and that any standardised components are moderated. Assessment of the youngest children should be confined to observational teacher/practitioner assessments. Standardised elements would best be placed at age 5 (serving as a baseline) and the end of the Foundation Phase at age 7.**
- **Ensure the Foundation Phase co-ordinators in maintained schools have sufficient knowledge and experience to understand the principles and practices within the Foundation Phase. In addition recommend that they are graded at a sufficient leadership level (such as members of the senior management team, deputy head etc) to make decisions and support the strategic direction of the school.**
- **Review the current adult to child ratio in reception classes. Currently it is 1:8, primary school staff, advisors and inspectors agreed that it could be increased to 1:10 without affecting quality. However, some schools may need to apply for an exception where, for example, they are situated in very rural areas or where they have a considerable number of children with additional needs such as Special Educational Needs (SEN) or English/Welsh as an Additional Language (E/WAL) as it would not be practical to increase the ratio.**

- **Consider making it compulsory that a qualified Teacher should lead practice in all Foundation Phase classes in maintained schools (including nursery classes).**
- **Clarify and define the role of the 10% teacher supporting funded non-maintained settings. Care should be taken to ensure all eligible funded non-maintained settings receive this support and that it is effective. Where resources allow, this support should be increased to 20%.**

**Table 1 The complete set of Stocktake Recommendations for the Welsh Government**

*(notes: the Section corresponds to the section of the report where this recommendation is linked to evidence; all recommendations regarding training are italicised):*

No	Recommendation	Section & page
1	<p>Appoint a strategic group of Foundation Phase experts from across Wales to take a strategic and long term planning role within the Foundation Phase. To devise a ten year plan to support the next steps in the implementation and consolidation of the Foundation Phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- using the Foundation Phase Framework for Children’s Learning for 3 to 7 year-olds in Wales (DCELLS, 2008) as a guide.</li> <li>- taking forward key recommendations from current evaluations, reviews and this Stocktake.</li> <li>- developing an effective communication strategy for across Wales.</li> <li>- acting as a conduit for all Foundation Phase changes, planning and evaluations.</li> </ul>	4 pg 25
2	<p>Consider current inspection processes and procedures, including making some changes in legislation in order to bring together Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn) inspections into one joint inspection process involving both inspectorates that is delivered across the Foundation Phase (3-7 age group). This should ensure that the inspections of all providers of the Foundation Phase (serving children aged 3 – 7) would be comparable. Note: In primary</p>	4 pg 25

	schools there should still be one inspection but with an inclusion of CSSIW type quality being added to the team and Foundation Phase reported alongside the Key Stage 2 inspection.	
3	Identify settings/schools of excellence to support continued professional development (CPD) and training of all staff. Identify methods of sharing best practice between maintained schools and all non-maintained settings and vice versa.	4 pg 25
4	<i>Consider compulsory training for leaders' across the sector including strategic leaders in the Country, consortia, primary head teachers, advisory staff, leaders of funded non-maintained settings and services to support their understanding of the principles and practices of the Foundation Phase. The training should be bespoke to the audience taking into account their history and previous experiences and include research showing how effective implementation of the Foundation Phase can support standards and impact on social and economic growth generally.</i>	4 pg 26
5	<i>Ensure that all modules/training are underpinned by theory and research making clear the value of effective early education. Links between theory and practice and the important role of the adult need to be explicit.</i>	4 pg 26
6	<i>Develop training that emphasises and exemplifies the progression of skills across the Foundation Phase. Models of effective implementation of the Foundation Phase should be shared and evaluated across the entire age range. Ensure these models and examples are readily available for individual maintained schools and non-maintained settings to access (perhaps on line and/or to visit).</i>	4 pg 26
7	Consider all three year old children's entitlement to high quality early education and care wherever their parents choose to place them. Additional training (including mentoring from a qualified teacher) and resources may be needed in funded and unfunded non-maintained settings to ensure equity of experience.	4 pg 26
8	<i>Develop training that ensures all staff have a good understanding of how language, literacy and numeracy develop and how to support children's development across the Foundation Phase including the important role of the adult.</i>	5 pg 30
9	<i>Develop training which includes clear guidance and examples of how the LNF fits within the Foundation Phase, 3-4 and 5-7. For example in the 3-4 guidance how songs and nursery rhymes can emphasise understanding of sounds in rhyme and alliteration.</i>	5 pg 30
10	Reconsider the scoring of the assessments at the end of the	

	Foundation Phase (Year 2) and the areas assessed at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6). In order to allow progression to be measured consider assessing: Language, literacy and communication skills, mathematics development and personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity in Year 2 and English/Welsh, mathematics, personal and social development in Year 6. Scoring the personal and social development separately and not as a composite with the more academic English and mathematics so that like can be compared with like.	5 pg 30
11	<i>Consider supporting progression and continuity throughout the Foundation Phase by developing some additional training and guidance to the LNF on practice in language, literacy and numeracy for 3 and 4 year olds, ensuring this is appropriate for these children. It should follow their individual learning and development needs, and fit with the experiential Foundation Phase philosophy and practice.</i>	5 pg 30
12	<i>Develop training that ensures all staff understand the research on the effects of disadvantage and poverty and the possible ways to close the achievement gap. Sharing good practice from those maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings where this is working well should be part of the training and so should research on supporting the home learning environment (HLE). Maintained schools could be asked to devote some of their Pupil Deprivation Grant (or similar) to support staff development here.</i>	6 pg 32
13	<i>Consider strengthening transition arrangements through training all staff involved in them together (staff from all non-maintained settings, Flying Start, Foundation Phase staff, Key Stage 2 staff etc). Training should include current research and theory together with practical examples of good transition practice.</i>	7 pg 34
14	Continue to develop (through EYDAF) and then implement an assessment profile which takes into account practitioners' skills. Ensuring that this profile continues throughout the Foundation Phase (ages 3-7) and that any standardised components are moderated. Assessment of the youngest children should be confined to observational teacher/practitioner assessments. Standardised elements would best be placed at age 5 (serving as a baseline) and the end of the Foundation Phase at age 7.	7 pg 34
15	<i>Develop specific bespoke training on leadership designed to support leaders across the sector, both within maintained schools and non-maintained settings, but especially including primary head teachers.</i>	8 pg 38
16	Ensure the Foundation Phase co-ordinators in maintained schools have sufficient knowledge and experience to understand the principles and practices within the Foundation Phase. In addition recommend that they are graded at a sufficient leadership level (such	8 pg 38

	as members of the senior management team, deputy head etc) to make decisions and support the strategic direction of the school.	
17	Ensure that Teaching Assistants (TAs) benefit from continued professional development (CPD) processes and support within maintained schools and that literacy and numeracy training is available for those that need it. Develop a career path for those practitioners working in the funded non-maintained settings and for TAs within maintained schools. Promote these opportunities and review the terms and working conditions of TAs to attract well-qualified staff.	8 pg 38
18	Review the current adult to child ratio in reception classes. Currently it is 1:8, primary schools' staff, advisors and inspectors agreed that it could be increased to 1:10 without affecting quality. However, some schools may need to apply for an exception where, for example, they are situated in very rural areas or where they have a considerable number of children with additional needs such as SEN or E/WAL as it would not be practical to increase the ratio.	8 pg 38
19	Promote closer working relationships between, for example, advisory staff and Initial teacher training (ITT) providers and between ITT providers themselves to support consistency of initial teacher training and quality of teaching of newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Identify maintained schools where the Foundation Phase is implemented well for students to visit and/or for placements.	9 pg 41
20	Consider making it compulsory that a qualified Teacher should lead practice in all Foundation Phase classes in maintained schools (including nursery classes).	9 pg 41
21	Clarify and define the role of the 10% teacher supporting funded non-maintained settings. Care should be taken to ensure all eligible funded non-maintained settings receive this support and that it is effective. Where resources allow, this support should be increased to 20%.	9 pg 41
22	Promote further training and qualifications of teachers within the Foundation Phase to Masters Level, including the Masters in Education Practice (MEP) Programme. Learning at this level should be designed to support and improve practice in the Foundation Phase and impact on leadership and effective deployment of TAs as well as support further understanding of the Foundation Phase pedagogy and practice, critical thinking, evaluation and recording skills.	9 pg 41
23	Review the level of support available to Foundation Phase providers across the sector from local authority and consortia development staff, umbrella organisations and early years teachers to identify gaps and ensure its suitability.	9 pg 41

## 2. Introduction

2.1 *Welsh policy*: Developing and supporting high quality early years experiences, for children aged 3-7 years, has been a Welsh Government imperative since the introduction of the new Foundation Phase (Foundation Phase) in 2004 and following devolution in 1999. The Foundation Phase was part of a major change and policy development implemented to 'get the best for Wales' (NAfW, 2001) and included a radical shift in policy and dedication of monies to the Foundation Phase for children aged 3 to 7 years. This new direction and emphasis on the Foundation Phase included the development of the Foundation Phase Framework for Children's Learning for 3 and 7 years Wales (DCELLS, 2008), allowed for higher adult to child ratios (1:8 in early years settings and reception classes; 1:15 in Years 1 and 2), additional resources for schools to develop outdoor learning environments, 10% qualified teacher time support in all funded non-maintained settings, new universal training modules, Training and Support Officers in each local authority, a carefully planned roll out of the Foundation Phase across Wales (which started with a pilot in 2004/5 and included all maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings by 2008/9). More recent policy developments include Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan (DfES, 2013a) which shows the Welsh Government's continued commitment to the Foundation Phase and outlines the current position with regards to the Foundation Phase as well as other strategies designed to 'improve the life chances and outcomes of all children in Wales' (p3). It looks beyond the Foundation Phase, including all children from pre-birth up until the day before their eighth birthday. One additional strategy which is particularly pertinent here is the vision and roll out of Flying Start for children aged 0-3, which provides for the earliest possible identification of potential need as a means of preventing developmental delay and supporting children's educational chances on entry to school.

2.2 *National and International evidence base*: Wales made these evidence-based decisions and changes as both national and international research highlighted the importance of the quality of early childhood education and care (DfES, 2013a). Early experiences lay the foundation for all learning (Sylva et al., 2004; Allen, 2011), they can reduce inequalities linked to parental background and socio-economic status (West et al., 2010; Manning et al., 2010) and they can have the most profound impact on economic growth and prosperity generally (Melhuish, 2004; Ho et al., 2010; Field, 2010; EIU, 2012). The specific aims of the Welsh Government included the desire to raise basic skills levels, overcome social disadvantage, promote the language and traditions of Wales and build a strong economically thriving community that embraced multiculturalism (NAfW, 2001).

2.3 *Monitoring effectiveness*: In order to monitor the effectiveness of the Foundation Phase several evaluations have been commissioned by Wales. Some of these are complete such as *Monitoring and Evaluation of the Effective Implementation of the*

*Foundation Phase (MEEIFoundation Phase) Project Across Wales – Foundation Phase Pilot: Final Evaluation Report Roll out age 3 – 6 (2004-2006)* (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2006), and the SQW research *Exploring Education Transitions for pupils aged 6 to 8 in Wales* (SQW: Morris et al., 2010). While others are ongoing and include: The Independent Evaluation of the Foundation Phase in Wales by the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD); The Regulation, Registration and Inspection Review (RR&IR) by Graham; and this rapid independent Stocktake. The Stocktake was commissioned from September 2013 for six months in order to assist in policy direction in conjunction with the final reports of the National Evaluation (WISERD) and the RR&IR.

*2.4 Previous evaluation findings:* This report builds upon the work of earlier and ongoing evaluations. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2006) evaluated the first two years (2004-2006) of the implementation of the Foundation Phase in the pilot maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings. They found that the quality of teaching and learning in maintained schools was higher than in the funded non-maintained settings, where practitioners were more likely to nurture children's intellectual development as well as their social-emotional wellbeing. This is a similar finding to other studies (e.g. Sylva et al, 2004) where the qualifications of practitioners, especially graduate led teachers, appears to be a determining factor for the quality of provision. As this evaluation only considered the first two years of implementation it was difficult to determine the full impact on standards, however stakeholder perceptions identified a number of positive findings linked to the Foundation Phase. These included a positive impact on educational experiences for the children through better management and organisation (afforded by the reduction in ratios) and better opportunities for learning and an improved learning environment. They also reported that practitioners told them that the curriculum was more supportive of the children's learning as it was child centred and based on a play pedagogy of active, experiential learning. Following the second year of implementation, Siraj-Blatchford et al (2006) found a drop in standards in relation to literacy and interactions when compared to the first. They attributed this to less planning for individual needs and a lack of understanding of the play and experiential pedagogy. They made a number of recommendations which will be discussed, where relevant, within the main body of this report.

In 2010 SQW focused on the pilot and early start schools and the challenges, benefits and children's experiences during transition from Foundation Phase to Key Stage 2 and how these differed to those during transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 (SQW: Morris et al., 2010). They reported that teachers and pupils felt that most children, regardless of whether they were transferring from the Foundation Phase or Key Stage 1, were looking forward to their move to Year 3. Some Foundation Phase teachers felt that transitions were smoother within the Foundation Phase than previously, however no definitive link could be made between improved transitions and the Foundation Phase at that time. While considering the Foundation

Phase more generally, they reported that most practitioners within the Foundation Phase, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 were familiar with the Foundation Phase approach. However, the implementation of the Foundation Phase varied and there were some tensions around age and ability grouping of pupils and the preparation needed to help them meet the requirements of Key Stage 2. They identified a need for further training, guidance and practical support. They recommended that schools developed a single shared philosophy in line with the ethos of the Foundation Phase and that practitioners had the opportunity to experience, question and reflect on practice within the Foundation Phase. They suggested that developing common classroom practices across the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 would support smooth transitions. They also reported that newly qualified teachers and teachers in training needed to be more aware of Foundation Phase practices and the importance of supporting transitions into Key Stage 2.

The independent Evaluation of the Foundation Phase in Wales by the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD), have produced three reports which were available for us to consider. Their evaluation is still ongoing and so further information together with recommendations will be forthcoming however they were not available at the time of finalising this report. To date they have produced an annual report and outcomes report: *Evaluating the Foundation Phase: Annual Report 2011/12* (Taylor et al, 2013) and *Evaluating the Foundation Phase: the Outcomes of Foundation Phase Pupils (Report 1)* (Davies et al, 2013). Within these, they reported mixed findings. On the one hand they reported positive attitudes towards the Foundation Phase by advisors who suggested training is key. Then a mixture of good and poor implementation which they suggested was linked to the roll out and to the decentralisation of support and training which was variable across LAs. They identified two key factors in success 1) the attitude of the head teacher and senior management and 2) the skills, qualifications and training of the teachers and teaching and learning assistants. In addition, they considered absenteeism, again with mixed results, however they did detect a slight decline in absenteeism in schools in the final roll out of the Foundation Phase. Finally, they found some tentative suggestions that standards in English, Maths and Science may have slightly improved. Their third report, *Evaluating the Foundation Phase: Policy Logic Model and Programme Theory* (Maynard et al, 2012) is discussed in more detail in section 4.

### 3. The stocktake process

3.1 *The Stocktake*: In Summer 2013 Huw Lewis, the Minister for Education and Skills, announced that a Stocktake of the implementation of the Foundation Phase would take place over the following six months (September 2013 to March 2014). The Welsh Government commissioned Professor Iram Siraj and Denise Kingston from the Institute of Education, University of London, to conduct a Stocktake of the Foundation Phase. The scope of the Stocktake was agreed and laid out in the Terms of Reference for the Foundation Phase as follows:

- Understand how well the Foundation Phase is being implemented across Wales
- Clarify how language development, literacy and numeracy skills are embedded across all AOLs in both maintained and funded non-maintained settings across the whole age range
- Gauge how well the Foundation Phase addresses raising the quality of learning for children subject to socio-economic deprivation
- Establish how and when children enter the Foundation Phase and how progression, particularly from Flying Start to the Foundation Phase and then to Key Stage 2, is or can be demonstrated
- Identify where there is variability in quality focussing on leadership, workforce and the experience of the child
- Establish how well the Foundation Phase principles and requirements are embedded in ITT and on-going CPD
- Make recommendations for improvement.

The terms of reference for this Stocktake were drawn widely and given the brief timescale the Stocktake concentrated on those aspects that would be most likely to inform future policy. The Stocktake focussed on key stakeholders, experts and best practice on the implementation of the Foundation Phase and further considered the detail of how the Foundation Phase supported individual children, their families and communities as well as aspects of leadership (including the standards agenda), qualifications, training and transitions.

A guiding principle for the Stocktake was to draw upon and work alongside the on-going Foundation Phase Evaluation (WISERD). At the time of the Stocktake the only materials available to us were those already published on the Welsh Government website.

3.2 *Stocktake consultations*: The Stocktake gathered its evidence through a series of consultations and observations which are described in the table of Stocktake evidence below.

**Table 2 Stocktake consultations**

<b>Method</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Number completed</b>
<b>1.Task and Finish group</b>	Included representatives from across Wales including from ESTYN, CSSIW, maintained primary and nursery schools, funded non-maintained settings, WalesPPA, DfES, consortia and local authorities, advisors, Flying Start.	4 meetings, 12 hours
<b>2. Visits to good and excellent schools and settings</b>	<p>Visits were made across North and South Wales and included good and excellent Welsh and English Medium maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings. The following sectors were included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Funded non-maintained settings serving 3-4 year olds, (x3)</li> <li>2. Maintained schools serving 3-4 year olds (including those which are part of a primary school) (x4)</li> <li>3. Maintained schools serving 5 -7 year olds (x4)</li> </ol> <p>The visits included observations of practice and environments, interviews with leadership and key staff, samples of planning and other paper evidence.</p>	N=11
<b>3.Focus groups</b>	<p>Focus groups included leaders and other staff from good and excellent schools and settings across North and South Wales including Welsh Medium schools and settings (these teachers/practitioners were from schools and settings other than those visited). Representatives from different LAs and consortia, advisory teachers, further education tutors involved in initial teacher training, childcare membership organisations (i.e. NDNA, WalesPPA, Mudiad Meithrin and PACEY) and the Care Council for Wales (CCW).</p> <p>The 6 focus groups (1 ½ hours each) were organised to include personnel with particular interests in the following sectors:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Funded non-maintained settings serving 3-4 year olds, (x2)</li> <li>2. Maintained schools serving 3-4 year olds (including those which are part of a primary school) (x2)</li> <li>3. Maintained schools serving 5 -7 year olds (x2)</li> </ol>	6 groups, Total Attendees =67
<b>4. Questionnaires</b>	On-line questionnaires were distributed to the T and F group, to all visited maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings and all members of the focus groups. These were completed either individually or following discussion with colleagues as a composite response.	N=75

The Stocktake had four main means of gathering information and validating findings and we are grateful to all of those individuals and organisations that took the time to talk to us, allow us to visit them and submit their views via the questionnaires. In particular, we owe a great deal to the professionalism and support given to the Stocktake by the DfES, who were members of the Task and Finish Group and arranged meetings, visits and focus groups on our behalf. The Task and Finish Group included stakeholders from across Wales (see Appendix 1 for a list of members) and acted as an expert group who supported the compilation of the questionnaires, each completed a questionnaire and validated the themes as they emerged, they were an indispensable source of evidence and critique.

We were privileged to be able to make visits to maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings with best practice. These visits included discussions with leadership and key staff, observations within the Foundation Phase and of the physical environments, and a collection of additional materials such as prospectuses and planning. All of the maintained schools and most of the funded non-maintained settings subsequently completed questionnaires.

Finally, but by no means least, we are grateful to all of those people that attended the focus groups. These groups included teachers and practitioners from good and excellent maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings, other than those we visited, as well as representatives from services and institutions with a key role to play in the successful implementation of the Foundation Phase. They were lively and informative and supported a wide ranging and up to date view of the current implementation of the Foundation Phase. The focus groups supported validation of previous findings as well as allowing us to 'drill deeper' on certain issues that had emerged during the Task and Finish Group meetings and/or during visits or previous focus groups. Many of the attendees from the focus groups also subsequently completed an in depth questionnaire.

While many of the questionnaires were completed individually others were composite responses e.g. from all school staff working in the Foundation Phase, a network of funded non-maintained settings or members from regional forums etc. All stakeholders who attended the focus groups, the maintained schools, funded non-maintained settings and those who completed a questionnaire have not been named here in order to respect their confidentiality.

*3.3 The findings and recommendations:* The Stocktake's findings and recommendations have been reported under the main headings agreed in the terms of reference. We begin with the bigger picture of the implementation of the Foundation Phase and then continue to look at the specific issues around standards, disadvantage, transitions, leadership, qualifications and training.

Although we visited and spoke to staff from both English medium and Welsh medium maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings and services we have not

made any specific comments about the main language used, as the recommendations are equally applicable to both.

Unfunded non-maintained settings were outside the remit of the Stocktake and so we did not visit them or ask specific questions about them. Through our focus group discussions and other meetings, however, we understand that some of these settings are supporting children's education and care by implementing the Foundation Phase while others are not. Further, some such settings are invited and able to attend Foundation Phase training while others are not; training for unfunded settings is neither consistent nor guaranteed across the country. It therefore seems important that while planning for children's entitlement and the future implementation of the Foundation Phase these anomalies should be considered in order to ensure the equity of experiences and opportunities for all 3-7 year olds.

Within each of the following sections, the discussions relate directly to the heading: a key question taken from the aims of the Stocktake. Each section has a series of sub-sections which are numbered and given sub-headings to provide a reference to the discussions and issues which led to the recommendations which appear at the end of each section. Individual sections typically begin by outlining the international context followed by the Welsh context, a description of the effective implementation of the Foundation Phase followed by a description of the ineffective implementation. Included with the discussion of ineffective implementation are a number of identified issues which then relate to the list of recommendations at the end of each section. The majority of the sections follow this format with the exception of section 4 which has a much wider remit than the other sections. It begins with an international focus considering effective early childhood care and education frameworks and then considers the Welsh Foundation Phase framework (DCELLS, 2008). This is followed by a description of effective implementation of the Foundation Phase and then a number of different issues relating to ineffective implementation.

## **4. Findings and recommendations: how well is the Foundation Phase being implemented across Wales?**

*4.1 Effective Early Childhood Frameworks:* Effective frameworks provide guidelines which help staff to clarify their pedagogical aims, provide a structure for the day, focus on assessment, planning and progression and support concentration on the important aspects of child development (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004). Key messages and guidance within frameworks, such as the Framework for Children's Learning for 3 to 7 year-olds in Wales (DCELLS, 2008), are known to support quality across different forms of provision and for different groups of children as long as they are clear and well-articulated (OECD, 2006). A good framework should support schools and settings in equipping children with the knowledge and skills needed for the next educational phase and further learning and facilitate transitions between educational levels (UNESCO, 2004), while also allowing minor adaptations to suit the culture and variable needs across and within them (OECD, 2006).

*4.2 The Welsh Foundation Phase Framework:* In Wales, the Foundation Phase Framework (DCELLS, 2008) and associated guidance has been developed with consideration given to many other well established and valued early childhood education and care philosophies and practices across the world. Maynard et al (2012) in their evaluation report 'Evaluating the Foundation Phase: Policy Logic Model and Programme theory' carefully analysed similarities with other programmes such as Reggio Emilia' in Northern Italy, Te Whāriki in New Zealand, early years practice in Scandinavia and the Developmentally Appropriate Practice found in HighScope settings in USA. They considered the pedagogy within the policy documents and training associated with the Foundation Phase in detail and suggested that the Foundation Phase is closely aligned to and included elements of different internationally respected and valued approaches to early childhood education and care.

*4.3. Effective Implementation of the Foundation Phase in Wales:* Despite there being considerable variability across Wales the Stocktake enabled visits and talk with teachers and practitioners from good and excellent maintained schools and good funded non-maintained settings both in South and North Wales (as determined by Estyn). The Stocktake noted that in these maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings the principles of the Foundation Phase were effectively put into practice, albeit in slightly different ways and on occasion with some variability across the ages. The practitioners working there had a clear view of what constituted an effective Foundation Phase, they kept focus on standards, planned well and adjusted their pedagogy to suit the children and families. They also typically had the leader of the Foundation Phase in a position to make decisions and implement change, in schools this was often as part of the senior management team. Where the

implementation was effective, improvements in children's outcomes were reported across the Foundation Phase and often beyond. Settings reported improvements in the areas of literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. In schools, the impact appeared most distinct in Years 1 and 2, the reasons given for this were that the pedagogy and practice had been in place for nursery and reception classes prior to the changes. One major impact reported was the children's attitude to learning, they were more independent and active. Boys in particular seemed to respond well to the Foundation Phase, talking more and engaging more with their learning. The children generally appeared to have greater ownership and involvement in their learning. Interestingly these findings are similar to those reported in Estyn's recent annual report (Estyn, 2014)

4.4. *Variability across the sector and inspection issues:* The Stocktake confirmed that there is considerable variability across Wales, and the impression that the quality of implementation of the Foundation Phase appears to be of a higher standard in maintained schools and nursery schools as compared to funded non-maintained settings remains (see Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2006). Interestingly, a recent literature review of research considering school and system reform confirmed that an overreliance on provision subject to market forces typically militates against the achievement of children from the poorest backgrounds (Hopkins, 2013). However, consideration of quality differences across the maintained and funded non-maintained sector were difficult to substantiate in Wales as the inspection processes (of Estyn and CSSIW) are historically different. In addition, the recent Estyn annual report confirmed that their reporting and inspection procedures differ between funded non-maintained settings and maintained schools delivering the Foundation Phase (Estyn, 2014). So comparing like with like across the Foundation Phase is very difficult.

Despite CSSIW and Estyn's attempts to work collaboratively and bring inspections closer together it has not been possible due to the disparate nature of the underlying legislation and accompanying processes. Having one joint inspection process (involving both Estyn and CSSIW) that is delivered across the Foundation Phase (including all providers with children aged 3-7) would be useful in the future to identify maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings of excellence as well as those that need support. It is important to be able to compare quality across the whole of the Foundation Phase in order to plan for improvement and ensure equity of entitlement to all children. With regards to the cycle of inspection, in order to ensure consistency of experience, more regular visits than the current Estyn six yearly cycle may be prudent, especially with providers serving the youngest children and in non-maintained settings where high turnover of staff is common (Sylva et al., 2004).

Finally, as mentioned above nursery schools in Wales have been seen to deliver some of the most effective implementation of the Foundation Phase in the past (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2006). However they are one form of Foundation Phase

provision that appears to have been negatively affected by recent changes. Reports suggest that in the last decade of the original 42 nursery schools only 17 remain. This needs further consideration, as - at a time when Wales is looking for models of good practice to support the implementation of the Foundation Phase- this may be overlooking a vital resource. Despite recognising that there is currently some variability in the quality of nursery schools across Wales, nursery schools generally have a number of distinctive features which could support the future implementation of the Foundation Phase, notably their specialist nature, highly qualified staff and their potential role as a hub for services for local families and communities and for the upskilling of childminders and other settings (Early Education, 2014).

*4.5 Communication issue:* Despite the Welsh Government's obvious continued commitment to the Foundation Phase, as expressed in their *Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan* (DfES, 2013a), whilst gathering evidence the Stocktake found that many staff were concerned about the future of the Foundation Phase and whether it was to continue. This appeared to be related to concerns that it was not yet being implemented effectively across the country in all maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings, that the initial baseline measure had been withdrawn and, most notably, the recent introduction and formality of the literacy and numeracy tests in Year two which appeared to some to signal a governmental move away from the Foundation Phase philosophy. The concern about the future of the Foundation Phase led to concerns over the continued funding for the Foundation Phase and members of focus groups in particular commented on the need for this to be clarified. The funding was seen as crucial for strategic planning across the country, to support staffing within maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings and for continued development and delivery of training and support by consortia and LA staff. There also needed to be some clear guidance to ensure that accessing the funding was clear, transparent and equitable across the country. Finally, Wales has recently moved to a consortia led structure and away from individual LAs, Hopkins (2013) suggested that such changes can reduce variation and improve overall system performance. The Stocktake found that some people felt it was too early to comment on the change, however in relation to communication, there appeared to be an unease regarding high level decision making as Foundation Phase experts did not consider themselves to be in a position to have as strong a voice regarding strategic planning as previously.

*4.6 Pedagogy vs outcomes issue:* Maynard et al (2012) pointed to a few possible difficulties with the Foundation Phase framework (DCELLS, 2008) including a tension between the play based pedagogy, underpinned by a strongly developmental approach, and the current very detailed statutory curriculum expectations especially in relation to the Years 1 and 2 outcomes (in particular in the areas of literacy and numeracy) as they had not changed noticeably from those relating to the previous Key Stage 1 outcomes. Interestingly this had also been recognised within Wales and a Review of the Curriculum and Assessment in Wales is currently underway and in

the Foundation Phase particular attention is being given to the areas of learning of language, literacy and communication and mathematical development.

*4.7 Capacity issue:* The Stocktake recognised other tensions in Wales, namely that successful implementation of the Foundation Phase relies on all of the key players (including head and lead teachers/practitioners, class teachers, teaching assistants, nursery staff, governors, committee members, advisors and inspectors) understanding the principles and practices within a common and clear Foundation Phase framework and then being able to put these into action. Clearly there is a capacity issue in terms of experienced and knowledgeable staff to implement the Foundation Phase which is evidenced by the variability of practice across the country. This is due to the quick expansion of staff to meet new ratios and the extension of the Foundation Phase to age 7. The Foundation Phase may be grounded on well-established principles and practices but unless all of the relevant staff understand and ‘sign-up’ to these it is unlikely to be implemented effectively.

Where the implementation of the Foundation Phase was poor there was a lack of a clear and agreed view of how to implement the Foundation Phase or Foundation Phase model. Generally, this appears to be an issue across Wales. As a result, individual maintained school and funded non-maintained setting leaders and head teachers often needed to guide the practice themselves. For some this has worked well, however for many who lack the theoretical and research knowledge and understanding which underpin the principles behind the Foundation Phase this has been problematic. Misconceptions together with an inability to truly appreciate how young children learn, including notions of learning through play and experiential project based learning, resulted in many funded non-maintained settings and maintained schools ‘watering down’ effective early education practice. In maintained schools this led to a pendulum effect. Where initially on implementing the Foundation Phase, schools who did not understand how to structure the environment and support children in learning through play resulted in classrooms with a chaotic free-for-all play environment which did not work. As a result their confidence in the Foundation Phase diminished quickly and they ‘swung back’ to their old more familiar and often more formal processes and environments, typically in an effort to maintain standards. For staff working with older children support should be given to ensure they understand how to structure children’s experiences, opportunities and the environment to support and enhance learning with the emphasis placed on experiential learning rather than play, as learning through play appears to be misunderstood.

*4.8. Background and philosophy issue:* Complications due to staff having different historical backgrounds and previous (often longstanding) approaches to teaching and learning need to be considered. Prior to the introduction of the Foundation Phase staff working with 3 and 4 year olds in non-maintained settings and those working with 6 and 7 year olds in schools would typically see their roles very

differently (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004; Katz, 2011). Their earlier focus would have been likely to be on either care or education (teaching to the National Curriculum) respectively. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2006) noted the importance of supporting both children's intellectual development as well as their socio-emotional wellbeing and that in maintained schools where teachers are present this happens more regularly, thus flagging an important issue in funded non-maintained settings. The play based pedagogy found in many non-maintained settings prior to the implementation of the Foundation Phase was inadequate in supporting and extending children's learning as it rarely included planned play or tracking children's progress through careful observation and planning, which was guided and enriched by adults. Then in the older age group, the Stocktake noted reports of maintained schools who had not been able to successfully implement the Foundation Phase returning to more formal and didactic methods of teaching (see above and the pendulum effect). This is not to say that the Foundation Phase is likely to look the same for the entire Foundation Phase age group, it should show a progression and is likely to involve more specific instruction and planned experiences with the older children while still maintaining the experiential learning element together with aspects of choice, challenge and problems to solve and areas of learning which support independent enquiry within the environment. However, moving towards the Foundation Phase pedagogy is likely to involve many maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings in making a complete change in approach and practices and a fundamental shift in philosophy, understanding and knowledge of how children learn, which needs to be reflected in the training and support they are given, to enhance the adult role in supporting the Foundation Phase.

*4.9 Making Improvements:* In order to ensure effective implementation of the Foundation Phase all staff need to know that the Foundation Phase is here to stay. There needs to be a communication strategy developed that ensures all relevant stakeholders are aware of developments within the Foundation Phase. In addition, all relevant stakeholders need a good understanding of the principles and practices of the Foundation Phase as this is key to the successful learning and development of the children. This would include a working knowledge of experiential learning, meaningful projects that interest children, planning and assessment to ensure progression of skills across the Foundation Phase and an appropriate balance between focussed and independent learning, developing a play based, experiential pedagogy and providing an enriched and interesting environment within, outside and beyond the classroom based on children's interests. Staff should feel confident in delivering the Foundation Phase having a good understanding of child development and how children learn and develop. They need to be confident to critically reflect on their work and the implementation of the Foundation Phase, interpreting the curriculum to suit their children and families and the culture within their schools/settings rather than merely implementing it (Munton et al, 2002). In order to accomplish this more and rigorous training will need to be developed across Wales (see Appendix 2). In addition, finding, promoting and funding examples of exemplary

practice in maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings to act as models and for others to visit would augment this learning. Outstanding educational systems typically find ways of learning from their best and strategically use models of good practice to support improvement (Hopkins, 2013).

**Recommendations** (*note: recommendations regarding training are italicised*):

1. Appoint a strategic group of Foundation Phase experts from across Wales to take a strategic and long term planning role within the Foundation Phase. To devise a ten year plan to support the next steps in the implementation and consolidation of the Foundation Phase:

- using the Foundation Phase Framework for Children’s Learning for 3 to 7 year-olds in Wales (DCELLS, 2008) as a guide.
- taking forward key recommendations from current evaluations, reviews and this Stocktake.
- developing an effective communication strategy for across Wales.
- acting as a conduit for all Foundation Phase changes, planning and evaluations.

2. Consider current inspection processes and procedures, including making some changes in legislation in order to bring together Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn) inspections into one joint inspection process involving both inspectorates that is delivered across the Foundation Phase (3-7 age group). This should ensure that the inspections of all providers of the Foundation Phase (serving children aged 3 – 7) would be comparable. Note: In primary schools there should still be one inspection but with an inclusion of CSSIW type quality being added to the team and Foundation Phase reported alongside the Key Stage 2 inspection.

3. Identify settings/schools of excellence to support continued professional development (CPD) and training of all staff. Identify methods of sharing best practice between maintained schools and all non-maintained settings and vice versa.

*4. Consider compulsory training for leaders’ across the sector including strategic leaders in the Country, consortia, primary head teachers, advisory staff, leaders of funded non-maintained settings and services to support their understanding of the principles and practices of the Foundation Phase. The training should be bespoke to the audience taking into account their history and previous experiences and include research showing how effective implementation of the Foundation Phase can support standards and impact on social and economic growth generally.*

5. *Ensure that all modules/training are underpinned by theory and research making clear the value of effective early education. Links between theory and practice and the important role of the adult need to be explicit.*

6. *Develop training that emphasises and exemplifies the progression of skills across the Foundation Phase. Models of effective implementation of the Foundation Phase should be shared and evaluated across the entire age range. Ensure these models and examples are readily available for individual maintained schools and non-maintained settings to access (perhaps on line and/or to visit).*

7. Consider all three year old children's entitlement to high quality early education and care wherever their parents choose to place them. Additional training (including mentoring from a qualified teacher) and resources may be needed in funded and unfunded non-maintained settings to ensure equity of experience

## **5. Findings and recommendations: how are language development, literacy and numeracy skills being embedded across all Areas of Learning?**

*5.1 International Context:* The importance of good foundations in language development, literacy and numeracy in order to support later learning is well documented (Sylva et al, 2004; Coghlan et al., 2009). Children's early communication skills and language development are regarded as the single best predictor of future cognitive development and school performance (Rosetti, 1996). Schools and settings that concentrate on language and communication are likely to make major advances in improvement priorities such as raising attainment, improving behaviour and narrowing the gap (Gross, 2013). Likewise literacy has also been shown to be beneficial for learning and school performance generally and that concentration here supports achievement across all curriculum subjects (Strickland and Riley-Ayres, 2006). There is a general consensus that mathematics, especially when viewed as the study of patterns, can be learnt from a very young age. For example, during play children often use abstract and numerical ideas (amount, size and shape) and that by capitalising on this and children's natural curiosity mathematical concepts, methods and language can be developed early in order to support later learning (National Research Council, 2009; Montague-Smith and Price, 2012).

*5.2. Language, literacy and numeracy learning in the Foundation Phase issues:* In Wales the importance of language development, literacy and numeracy are well recognised within the Foundation Phase framework (DCELLS, 2008) and with the more recent introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework for 5 – 14 year olds (DfES, 2013b). However, the Stocktake found that practice in supporting language, literacy and numeracy within the Foundation Phase was not consistent and on occasion did not follow the Foundation Phase principles. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2006) found a reduction in the quality of literacy and interactions in the second year following the introduction of the Foundation Phase during the pilot project. The Stocktake's meetings and focus group attendees reported having observed the introduction of formal methods of teaching literacy before the children had developed sufficient spoken language and formal methods of teaching mathematics too, usually in a mistaken effort to raise standards. Ineffective deployment of staff (often TAs work with the most needy children rather than the best qualified and experienced staff) and/or unclear guidance on how adults might support children's interactions, language development, emergent writing/numeracy and reading/writing/numeracy activities were noted as possible reasons for this. Staff need guidance on supporting speaking and listening skills, emergent literacy and numeracy, linking learning to interests and allowing children to understand the purpose and function of literacy and numeracy. Staff need guidance on how best to support language, literacy and numeracy development through both independent

and focussed learning activities. They need to understand how to organise the environment to provide numerous opportunities for children to practice their language, literacy and numeracy at an appropriate level for them. In addition they need to feel confident to teach aspects of literacy and numeracy at the appropriate levels and to support parents/carers in developing their children's literacy and numeracy in the home learning environment. They need to feel confident in what they do, for example using songs and nursery rhymes to support phonological awareness through rhyme and alliteration, so that as they do this they can also draw the children's attention to it.

Unfortunately where this has not been available some maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings have searched for additional guidance themselves which appears to have led to an entrepreneurial culture and the development and adoption of an over reliance of very structured schemes of work for language, literacy and numeracy. Further, on occasion these schemes of work are followed rigidly and delivered in a very mechanistic way without any adaptations made for individual children. NAEYC (2002) while considering the development of various curricula suggested that it is essential that they meet all children's needs and truly focus on the child and their development. They noted that in today's society we are living within communities that are culturally diverse with children from different backgrounds and home environments and acknowledged that these children may well have different needs which effective schools and settings would need to adapt to. Estyn (2014) noted this move towards the use of commercial schemes and questioned both their reliability and the concern that they might be followed without adaptation to individual needs and progress.

*5.3 Standards issues in primary schools:* Recently the government has introduced the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF)(DfES, 2013b) and is currently reviewing the curriculum and assessments (DfES, 2013c). Primary school staff informed the Stocktake that it was too early to evaluate the LNF impact. However, they noted that the outcome measures were not always in line with those within the Foundation Phase Framework (DCELLS, 2008) and so work bringing these together needed to be done. The current Review of the Curriculum and Assessment in Wales will no doubt look at such issues. Views about the literacy and numeracy tests (Learning Wales, 2014) which accompanied the framework were variable with some people feeling it was too early to consider their impact, while others were positive and yet others critical. Some reported the overly formal compulsory paper-based assessment process to be at odds with the Foundation Phase philosophy. They suggested that this might lead to a reversion to formal ways of teaching in an effort to prepare children for the tests unless clear guidance was given. However, others who were implementing the Foundation Phase effectively, recognised the necessity of measuring progress at the end of the Foundation Phase and saw this as an appropriate time to assess children's achievements in a standardised way, they reported no particular changes in the delivery of the Foundation Phase as a result of introducing the tests. The Stocktake felt that the assessments would not unduly interfere with the pedagogy and practice within the Foundation Phase as long as the

tests occurred at the end of the phase or at the beginning of Key Stage 2, clear guidance was given and the Foundation Phase was being well implemented in the first place.

During the focus groups, particularly those that included primary school and advisory staff, discussion around assessment was a strong feature. A concern raised here related to the teacher assessments that follow the tests in Year 2 to show progression (DfES, 2013d). Currently, the assessments at the end of Year 2 (age 7) include the teachers in assessing the children in the following three areas of learning: language, literacy and communication, mathematics development and personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity which many agreed were appropriate. However concern was voiced around the scoring, as each child's scores for these areas of learning are totalled to make a composite score. As the composite score includes two very different constructs, with language, literacy and communication and mathematics development showing **academic progress** while personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity shows **socio-behavioural progress** it was agreed that making a change and keeping them separate would avoid spurious comparisons. In addition, there was general agreement that these scores should act as a baseline measure to similar assessments made at the end of Year 6 (age 11). This would allow the DfES to measure progress in mathematics, English or Welsh (dependant on first language) and social emotional wellbeing across Key Stage 2. It would also flag the importance of a more holistic approach to children's social wellbeing, as well as literacy and numeracy, to all primary school staff.

*5.4 Standards issues, 3 and 4 year olds:* Staff from across the Foundation Phase commented that as the LNF starts at the age of 5 there is a possibility that there will be a top down pressure to introduce elements of the framework at earlier and younger ages across the Foundation Phase. Others discussed the need to introduce a version of the framework, guidance on literacy and numeracy, that would be suitable for 3 and 4 year olds in order to avoid this and to ensure continuity across the Foundation Phase. Such guidance would be likely to include recommendations that staff are encouraged to support children playing with words and sounds, songs and rhymes and developing their mathematical concepts as they arise naturally and meaningfully. Most people we spoke to emphasised the need for such an adapted framework to be suitable and appropriate to the needs of these younger children and in particular to the needs of the most vulnerable children. Many stakeholders, including members of the Task and Finish Group, told us that in many maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings with large intakes from areas of deprivation in Wales the children start the Foundation Phase with poor vocabulary, little language, poor social-emotional development and lacking independence and self-help skills, such as toileting. In such cases it is imperative that education focuses on oracy and supporting personal and social development and care on self-help skills. Any additional guidance would therefore need to emphasise the individual assessment of the children's skills and abilities first to ensure that the education and

care is appropriate and supports their learning and development, it should also allow enough flexibility to ensure that all children's needs are met. In other words that teaching and learning follows the children's stages of development rather than their chronological ages. The literacy and numeracy learning outcomes, stipulated within the guidance/framework, that staff would be working towards would therefore need not be annual as that would be too constraining and inappropriately prescriptive leading to 'teaching to the outcomes'. The literacy and numeracy guidance, spanning the Foundation Phase from 3 to 7 years, should include only two sets of learning outcomes that should be acquired by the end of reception and then at the end of Year 2. It would also be unlikely to look like the remediation guidance, included in the current LNF, for those children of five years and above who are falling behind their peers.

**Recommendations** (*note: recommendations regarding training are italicised*):

8. *Develop training that ensures all staff have a good understanding of how language, literacy and numeracy develop and how to support children's development across the Foundation Phase including the important role of the adult.*
9. *Develop training which includes clear guidance and examples of how the LNF fits within the Foundation Phase, 3-4 and 5-7. For example in the 3-4 guidance how songs and nursery rhymes can emphasise understanding of sounds in rhyme and alliteration.*
10. Reconsider the scoring of the assessments at the end of the Foundation Phase (Year 2) and the areas assessed at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6). In order to allow progression to be measured consider assessing: Language, literacy and communication skills, mathematics development and personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity in Year 2 and English/Welsh, mathematics, personal and social development in Year 6. Scoring the personal and social development separately and not as a composite with the more academic English and mathematics so that like can be compared with like.
11. *Consider supporting progression and continuity throughout the Foundation Phase by developing some additional training and guidance to the LNF on practice in language, literacy and numeracy for 3 and 4 year olds, ensuring this is appropriate for these children. It should follow their individual learning and development needs, and fit with the experiential Foundation Phase philosophy and practice.*

## **6. Findings and recommendations: how well does the Foundation Phase address raising the quality of learning for children from low socio-economic backgrounds?**

*6.1 International context:* It is well established that parent's socio-economic status (SES) and qualifications are significantly related to children's achievements and that poverty has the greatest influence on child outcomes in the 3 – 7 years age range (Coghlan et al, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). A continuing question for EPPSE was whether pre- and primary school experiences or children's early home learning environment (HLE) could reduce inequality. They found that both were important factors in closing the gap and improving achievements (Sylva et al, 2004).

*6.2 Effective Implementation and understanding of disadvantage:* In Wales many of the staff in the maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings were aware of the effects of disadvantage and worked hard to overcome them. They explained that effective implementation of the Foundation Phase made this easier as it promoted team working within the school/setting and better relationships generally (including with external agencies) so that a whole school/setting approach could be developed. That the focus on the whole child within the Foundation Phase meant that teaching was personalised and support was targeted to individual needs such as language development and personal, social development. The greater emphasis on creative teaching and the improved ratios allowed for enrichment activities such as trips and visitors to the maintained school and funded non-maintained settings and a greater opportunity to enhance the continuous provision to engage and excite the children and add to the cultural and social capital. Some maintained schools suggested that the experiential and playful nature of the curriculum appeared to be more accessible to parents (and some mentioned males in particular) than the previous formal curriculum and so they seemed happier to engage in learning with their children both in the school and at home. Finally, they reported that with the introduction of the Foundation Phase they enjoyed better relationships with parents which in turn meant they were more likely to get involved with the school/setting and take advantage of any educational courses available within them.

*6.3 Ineffective implementation and understanding of disadvantage:* However, as previously explained, the implementation of the Foundation Phase is not consistent across the country and there are still some issues with practitioners and teachers understanding the nature of disadvantage. The Stocktake was informed that on occasion staff showed exclusionary attitudes, blamed parents/communities and had low expectations towards children and their families from areas of deprivation. While others, across both maintained schools and non-maintained settings, were failing to communicate and engage with parents. This was attributed to a lack of empathy and

an inability to understand disadvantage and the need to address it within the Foundation Phase.

**Recommendations** (*note: recommendations regarding training are italicised*):

12. *Develop training that ensures all staff understand the research on the effects of disadvantage and poverty and the possible ways to close the achievement gap. Sharing good practice from those maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings where this is working well should be part of the training and so should research on supporting the home learning environment (HLE). Maintained schools could be asked to devote some of their Pupil Deprivation Grant (or similar) to support staff development here.*

## **7. Findings and recommendations: How well does the Foundation Phase monitor/address transition and progression, from Flying Start to Foundation Phase and then to Key Stage 2?**

*7.1 International context:* Transitions are inevitable and natural occurrences within any child's life. There are a variety of types of transition including physical, life and psychological transitions (Kingston and Price, 2012). The focus for transitions here are the transitions into and out of the Foundation Phase. For many children the beginning of the Foundation Phase is their first major physical transition from home to a maintained school or funded non-maintained setting, while for others it may be the second as they have already attended a non-maintained setting such as Flying Start or an alternative non-maintained setting such as childcare prior to the age of 3. Transitions are important and those that are part of a child's educational experience are designed to support children's ongoing learning and development, such as attending a Foundation Phase school or setting or moving up to Key Stage 2. However, poorly managed transitions can be detrimental not only in the short term (as the child may feel anxious, bewildered, and uncomfortable) but also in the longer term as they impact on learning and development as well as their ability to cope with future transitions (Kingston and Price, 2012). Brooker (2008) reviewed research considering transition to maintained schools and estimated that 5 to 10 percent of children adapt poorly to school life and as a result continue to be at risk of school failure throughout their school careers. Fabian (2002) described three categories of change which are important to consider to support transitions. First physical changes, which include a new environment which is different in size, location, number of people etc; second, social change where the child's identity changes (as they become a playgroup attender or school child for instance) as does their social network and the people with whom they interact; and, third, philosophical changes where values, beliefs and approaches to education can be very different to those previously experienced. An additional category of change to consider here is the curriculum and whether it equips children with the knowledge and skills needed for further learning and so facilitates smooth transitions (UNESCO, 2004).

*7.2 Welsh context:* In Wales the Stocktake found that transition processes varied between good links and transfer processes to none, many of the reasons can be extrapolated from information in section 4. However, some specific issues are worth mentioning here. First, in maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings where the implementation of the Foundation Phase was effective it supported staff in understanding the theoretical background to learning through play and then allowed them to build on gains made in Flying Start and other settings. Where the Foundation Phase was well embedded and regarded, it supported all transitions as the children had developed good learning dispositions (such as concentration,

perseverance and determination) and independence. In some maintained schools who embraced the philosophy of the Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 practice was also adapted to be more active and experiential. The staff set challenges for the children to solve using first hand experiential approaches in a similar but perhaps more abstract way than in earlier years. Their classrooms were also adapted to allow more choice and independence and outdoor learning. This is interesting as these findings suggest that some schools have built upon some of the recommendations outlined in the SQW report on transitions into Key Stage 2 (SQW: Morris et al., 2010).

*7.3 Transition issues:* Many maintained schools and non-maintained settings have developed their own processes for transferring information on transition however many people expressed the need for a continuous assessment tool so that information can be transferred between schools/settings in a recommended, familiar and helpful way. Some LAs have developed systems for tracking and transitions, however only some of these continue with the children into maintained schools as many maintained schools use alternative methods. Some maintained schools may not use the information from Flying Start and non-maintained settings at all. Having a continuous national assessment tool (and some people saw this spanning birth to the end of primary school but everyone agreed that it should at least span the Foundation Phase) will require careful co-ordination as it would need to sit well with other initiatives including the current curriculum development. It should emphasise teacher and practitioner assessment and will require training in the use of observation as a way of measuring impact and children's progress, as well as supporting ongoing and future teaching and learning. It will require additional training to ensure that all relevant staff are familiar with it, that moderation is rigorous and to ensure all staff are equally competent. Non-maintained setting staff may require additional support/further qualifications to ensure that they are equipped to measure progress in this way.

**Recommendations** (*note: recommendations regarding training are italicised*):

13. *Consider strengthening transition arrangements through training all staff involved in them together (staff from all non-maintained settings, Flying Start, Foundation Phase staff, Key Stage 2 staff etc). Training should include current research and theory together with practical examples of good transition practice.*
14. Continue to develop (through EYDAF) and then implement an assessment profile which takes into account practitioners' skills. Ensuring that this profile continues throughout the Foundation Phase (ages 3-7) and that any standardised components are moderated. Assessment of the youngest children should be confined to observational teacher/practitioner assessments. Standardised elements would best be placed at age 5 (serving as a baseline) and the end of the Foundation Phase at age 7.

## **8. Findings and recommendations: is there variability in quality focusing on leadership, workforce and the experience of the child?**

*8.1 International context, leadership:* The quality of the leadership within schools and early education and care is known to have important effects on all aspects of the children's learning and development (Spillane, 2005; Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet, 2014). Leadership is a crucial factor in school and service transformation and improvement (Hopkins, 2013) so it is particularly pertinent in Wales with the introduction of the Foundation Phase. For change to be successful it requires those involved to feel empowered and active in the process of change and also requires time for professional development, resource development and impact evaluation (Rodd, 2013; Lindon, 2010). Leaders are key in supporting their staff in understanding the underpinning policies, identifying any problems (reframing these where necessary) and supporting implementation. Staff need time for discussion and to ask questions, they need to be able to critically reflect and find their own solutions. Leaders may need to support staff in reviewing their existing beliefs and assumptions especially if they hold a deficit view of children and families, encourage them to analyse and evaluate their own practice and challenge the way they interact with children and families (Shonkoff, 2010; Mitchell and Cubey, 2003).

*8.2 Effective leadership in Wales:* In Wales, the maintained schools with effective implementation of the Foundation Phase appeared to have a number of common leadership aspects. First, the head teacher typically possessed excellent generic leadership and change management skills. Second, they recognised the need for leadership to have a clear understanding of the principles and practices within the Foundation Phase. They were interested and researched the Foundation Phase for themselves but also ensured that they appointed a Foundation Phase co-ordinator with good knowledge and experience of the Foundation Phase. Third, particularly if they took a distributive or collaborative approach to leadership, they ensured that the Foundation Phase co-ordinator was in a strong position to lead and manage change, typically they were recognised as an important school leader such as a deputy head and were part of the senior management team. The head teachers had a whole school vision for the Foundation Phase within their school and for many, the principles were applicable across the whole primary school. They were informed by data, knowing the strengths and areas for development within their school, but were not driven by it. The children (and their families) were placed at the centre of school life and learning and they trusted their staff, who worked as a team, to do the best for them. In funded non-maintained settings, leaders who had had training in leadership appeared to develop the best teams, support the children's learning, make good relationships with parents and had the best staff retention.

*8.3 Ineffective leadership in Wales:* Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, in her recent annual report noted that strong leadership is one of the key factors in making improvements, but that the quality of leadership in maintained schools is still uneven. She suggested that in order to make improvements here schools should develop partnerships with other schools, parents, agencies and local authorities (Estyn, 2014). This exemplifies the need for systems leadership and leadership training within maintained schools. However leadership training is important across the sector (see recommendation 4 and section 4).

Leadership training in funded non-maintained Foundation Phase settings is not common, it is more common amongst Flying Start leaders who typically have qualifications at NVQ level 4 or above. Leadership training for class teachers is also rare. Yet both of these leaders are responsible for leading others and supporting the development of their teams. Building and supporting team working is known to improve practice and support colleagues in the workplace (Siraj-Blatchford and Hallett, 2014). Staff told the Stocktake that in maintained schools where the Foundation Phase was not valued the weakest teachers were placed in the younger children's classes as the Foundation Phase was perceived to be an 'easy option'. In some maintained schools, the Foundation Phase co-ordinator may not even teach within the Foundation Phase and so have little understanding of the challenges within it. Or alternatively they held such a low management level that they had little power to make changes, influence practice with other staff or get involved in whole school decision making.

*8.4 International and Welsh context re qualifications and ratios:* Research consistently points to the importance of well qualified staff to support the learning and development of children within the Foundation Phase (Sylva et al 2004; Nutbrown, 2012). With the introduction of the Foundation Phase, Wales increased the adult to child ratios which in turn resulted in an immense increase in the number of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in schools. Adult to child ratios are important to quality particularly with younger children, however there is nothing more important to quality than the quality of staff (Nutbrown, 2012). There remains a good deal of controversy about the impact of reducing ratios and the value that TAs bring to children's learning (Blatchford et al, 2009; Education Endowment Toolkit, 2014). The Education Endowment Toolkit (2014) reports that generally TAs can make a difference to the management of a classroom but not to the learning and development of children unless this is specifically planned for and supported with effective training and critical reflection on lessons and learning. That the development of learning should never be entirely left to TAs and the deployment and effectiveness of TAs need to be evaluated within each school. Furthermore, and particularly pertinent here, it is the change in approach to teaching afforded by smaller classes rather than the reduction per se that makes the difference to children's achievements and behaviour.

*8.5 Benefits of increased staffing in Wales:* One effect of the introduction of the Foundation Phase in Wales has been a rapid increase in staffing and as a consequence less qualified, cheaper staff have entered the Foundation Phase workforce. In maintained schools this is typically the TAs who supported the new ratios and in funded non-maintained settings, where a number of staff have transferred into maintained schools, these are likely to be new people to the profession. This relates to the capacity issue discussed in section 4. In some maintained schools the TAs are included in their CPD processes and enjoy targeted training and support. They are also fully involved with the planning, assessment and other processes within the Foundation Phase. Specifically, within schools the increase in staffing has allowed the development of indoors and outdoors classrooms, and has led to more talk and interactions between the adults and children. It has also allowed for more opportunities to develop adult intensive activities such as developing role play areas, art and cooking activities. Some schools however suggested that a lowering of the adult to child ratios within reception classes to 1:10 would be possible and desirable without compromising quality. Where well qualified and knowledgeable teaching staff are present it could even be possible to lower this further to 1:12 without jeopardising quality. It is important to recognise that the quality of the adult is more important than the quantity.

*8.6 Additional Staffing and ratio issues:* In some maintained schools in Wales, TAs were not well supported or involved in the implementation of the Foundation Phase, instead they were used to support classroom management and run remedial interventions with little change in teaching approach to before the increase in ratios. Such approaches were more common in maintained schools where the class teachers had not had the experience of leading a team or the necessary training and where the Foundation Phase was not well understood or implemented.

During the Stocktake, some teachers reported anxieties that the introduction of the LNF may lead to more TAs being diverted to support intervention programmes while others reported that without TAs getting proper guidance on their role in supporting children's learning some children were becoming over reliant on adults. In addition, there were concerns that many TAs did not have sufficient literacy or numeracy skills to support the children's learning. Finally, concern was raised that the higher qualified early years practitioners in non-maintained settings were transferring to work in maintained schools where the pay and conditions were better, lowering the quality across the non-maintained sector.

The change in ratios appears to have had little positive impact on funded non-maintained settings, as their ratios have not been increased, however they report having lost staff and that staff retention is difficult especially following NVQ training and if they are Welsh speakers.

During visits to maintained schools and focus groups the Stocktake asked whether the ratios were correct at each of the ages. For reception classes most people agreed that the ratio could be increased to 1:10 so that the saved monies could be diverted into training and support.

**Recommendations** (*note: recommendations regarding training are italicised*):

15. *Develop specific bespoke training on leadership designed to support leaders across the sector, both within maintained schools and non-maintained settings, but especially including primary head teachers*
16. Ensure the Foundation Phase co-ordinators in maintained schools have sufficient knowledge and experience to understand the principles and practices within the Foundation Phase. In addition recommend that they are graded at a sufficient leadership level (such as members of the senior management team, deputy head etc) to make decisions and support the strategic direction of the school.
17. Ensure that Teaching Assistants (TAs) benefit from continued professional development (CPD) processes and support within maintained schools and that literacy and numeracy training is available for those that need it. Develop a career path for those practitioners working in the funded non-maintained settings and for TAs within maintained schools. Promote these opportunities and review the terms and working conditions of TAs to attract well-qualified staff.
18. Review the current adult to child ratio in reception classes. Currently it is 1:8, primary schools' staff, advisors and inspectors agreed that it could be increased to 1:10 without affecting quality. However, some schools may need to apply for an exception where, for example, they are situated in very rural areas or where they have a considerable number of children with additional needs such as SEN or E/WAL as it would not be practical to increase the ratio.

## **9. Findings and recommendations: how well are the Foundation Phase principles and requirements embedded in ITT and ongoing CPD?**

9.1 *Qualified Teacher Status and quality teaching*: Qualified teachers have been shown to impact positively on the quality of teaching and learning with young children in a number of studies (Sylva et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2006). Further, the quality of teaching is the most important determinant of children's outcomes (Barber and Mourshed, 2009). Teacher quality in turn is strongly related to the teachers' own educational experiences, including initial teacher training (Mussett, 2010). Mussett (2010) while considering the quality of teacher education across the world concluded that initial teacher training should include a balance of provision which supports teachers' content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and practical school experience. The importance of the quality and effectiveness of teachers is evident within Wales, see for example the recent review of initial teacher training (Tabberer, 2013).

9.2 *Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT) issues*: In Wales, teachers and advisors reported variable skills in NQTs in implementing the Foundation Phase. They reported that NQTs were better prepared when they had had placements in maintained schools that implemented the Foundation Phase well, where they could see the theory in practice. The Higher Education (HE) Institutions who were Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers reported different processes for supporting their students' understandings of the Foundation Phase, and many explained how they were working to make them more robust. They all emphasised the importance of placement experiences in maintained schools where the Foundation Phase was effectively implemented.

9.3 *Qualified Teacher issues*: In some nursery classes, where it is not statutory to employ a qualified teacher, some maintained schools are not appointing teachers to lead practice. Research strongly suggests that graduate leaders support the quality of learning and teaching best (Sylva et al, 2004). In funded non-maintained settings access to the 10% teacher time is variable and further what the teachers do to support teaching and learning is variable. Guidance and training in supporting and mentoring, including modelling good practice in the Foundation Phase, should be developed for teachers working in the funded non-maintained sector. A clear role for the 10% teaching time should be outlined and clearly demarked, however teachers should also know who to contact if they have any concerns which fall outside of their remit. Where funding allows, increasing this input to 20% would be desirable. Finally, in order to enhance understanding of the Foundation Phase and support leadership and management within the Foundation Phase, Foundation Phase teachers should consider postgraduate training at Masters' level.

9.4. *Continued Professional Development (CPD) and training:* Tatton (2005) suggested professional development of staff is the way to improve the quality of provision. As well as considering ITT, the Stocktake also looked at training, one aspect of CPD. Training is defined here as professional development activities that occur outside the formal education system (Maxwell et al., 2005). Wales has developed a range of modules which were designed to be delivered across the country to support the implementation of the Foundation Phase by LA and/or consortia personnel. Numerous studies have shown that training supports quality and more specifically children's learning and wellbeing (Burchinal et al., 2002; Fukkink and Lont., 2007). Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2006) reported that early years provision was of a higher quality when the staff were well trained and qualified with a good understanding of child development and pedagogy. Funkkink and Lont (2007) reported that training can enhance practitioners' support of children's personal and social development as well as their involvement with the children. In addition it can support children's language and physical developments through the provision of richer learning experiences. They suggested that training that supported practitioners' understanding of developmentally appropriate practice was particularly beneficial. CPD needs to provide professional learning opportunities which support the development of a common practice of teaching and learning across the Foundation Phase. This would best be achieved through combining understandings of theory and evidence based practice and collaborative working across the maintained schools, funded non-maintained settings, LA and consortia services, and other central services such as Estyn and CSSIW and HE institutions (see review of literature in Hopkins, 2013).

9.5. *Training issues:* The universal modules that were developed at the beginning of the implementation of the Foundation Phase were generally of weak quality and as a result have been changed and augmented by individual LAs and consortia over the years. Some new versions have been shared with the Stocktake and represent significant improvements to the original modules, particularly in relation to providing examples of high quality physical environments. Given such individual LA and consortia changes it is difficult to establish whether there is a universal offer for training any more.

The Stocktake found the differences and inequalities in training and their accessibility to all appropriate staff concerning and the level and content of the initial training at least was lacking. It appeared to be aimed at the funded non-maintained sector and for those working with the younger age groups. Specific recommendations have been made about training throughout the report and include: ensuring that it is 'fit-for-purpose' and suits its audiences; guidelines on how the Foundation Phase fits with other current policy directions, such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF), are developed; all leaders (at consortia as well as maintained schools and funded non-maintained setting level), Key Stage 2 staff and all non-maintained settings can access relevant training. In addition, certain

areas of practice and information need to be strengthened including: the benefits of the Foundation Phase to all children, families and communities within Wales in terms of opportunities for learning and development and economic growth generally; leadership skills; reflective practice; understanding how children learn and develop; the effects of poverty and disadvantage; the importance of the home learning environment and supporting transitions. Further, a greater emphasis should be placed on linking theory and research to practice and in particular to the adult role in supporting learning and development across all training modules. Future development of modules would best be supported by experts in training and module development at the required levels, for example by the Open University or another institution with equivalent expertise in child development and training. Finally, clear models and examples of effective practice within the Foundation Phase across the sector need to be identified and made available and accessible. Dissemination of information and examples of best practice could be made available on a Foundation Phase website as long as it is readily accessible and regularly updated. Accessibility and being kept up to date were common complaints by teachers and practitioners of the website in the MEEIFP project (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2006) which would need to be avoided if this were to be effective.

**Recommendations** (*note: recommendations regarding training are italicised*):

19. Promote closer working relationships between, for example, advisory staff and ITT providers and between ITT providers themselves to support consistency of initial teacher training and quality of teaching of NQTs. Identify maintained schools where the Foundation Phase is implemented well for students to visit and/or for placements.
20. Consider making it compulsory that a qualified Teacher should lead practice in all Foundation Phase classes in maintained schools (including nursery classes).
21. Clarify and define the role of the 10% teacher supporting funded non-maintained settings. Care should be taken to ensure all eligible funded non-maintained settings receive this support and that it is effective. Where resources allow, this support should be increased to 20%.
22. Promote further training and qualifications of teachers within the Foundation Phase to Masters' Level, including the Masters in Education Practice (MEP) Programme. Learning at this level should be designed to support and improve practice in the Foundation Phase and impact on leadership and effective deployment of TAs as well as support further understanding of the Foundation Phase pedagogy and practice, critical thinking, evaluation and recording skills.

23. Review the level of support available to Foundation Phase providers across the sector from local authority and consortia development staff, umbrella organisations and early years teachers to identify gaps and ensure its suitability.

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## Appendix 1: List of Foundation Phase Stocktake Task and Finish Group members

Alison Heale	Head Teacher, Dee Valley Federation of schools.
Amanda Gould	Representing Foundation Phase Training Support Officers
Angela Cheeseman	Early Years Team, Welsh Government
Annette Evans	Foundation Phase Lead Officer Conwy and strategic lead for Flying Start and Childcare
Denise Kingston	Research Officer
Emma Laing	Head Teacher, Tredegarville CinW Primary, Cardiff
Gaynor Brimble	System Leader Foundation Phase SE Wales Education Advisory Service
Iram Siraj	Chair
Janette Gahan	CSSIW
Joanne Starkey	Knowledge and Analytical Services, Welsh Government
Karen Cornish	Head of Early Years, Welsh Government
Linda Davies	Strategic Leader Foundation Phase, Central South Consortium
Joint representation from HMI	Estyn
Rhiannon Davies	Early Years Team, Welsh Government
Sharman Morgan	Wales Pre-school Providers Association (WPPA)

Wayne Warner

Early Years Development and Assessment  
Framework Project manager, Welsh  
Government

## **Appendix 2: Brief summary of training and associated recommendations and rationale**

### **Summary**

The information here has been summarised from the main body of the Stocktake of the implementation of the Foundation Phase report, please see this for greater detail and contextualisation. The definition of training within this appendix is confined to consideration of those aspects of CPD which could be usefully developed for use across Wales. It follows the rationale put forward for the universal modules developed at the beginning of the Foundation Phase.

The universal modules that were developed at the beginning of the implementation of the Foundation Phase were generally of weak quality and as a result have been changed and augmented by individual LAs and consortia over the years. Some new versions have been shared with the Stocktake and represent significant improvements to the original modules, particularly in relation to providing examples of high quality physical environments. Given such individual LA and consortia changes it is difficult to establish whether there is a universal offer for training any more.

The Stocktake found the differences and inequalities in training and their accessibility to all appropriate staff concerning and the level and content of the initial training at least was lacking. It appeared to be aimed at the funded non-maintained sector and for those working with the younger age groups. Specific recommendations have been made about training throughout the report and include: ensuring that it is 'fit-for-purpose' and suits its audiences; guidelines on how the Foundation Phase fits with other current policy directions, such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF), are developed; all leaders (at consortia as well as maintained schools and funded non-maintained setting level), Key Stage 2 staff and all non-maintained settings can access relevant training. In addition, certain areas of practice and information need to be strengthened including: the benefits of the Foundation Phase to all children, families and communities within Wales in terms of opportunities for learning and development and economic growth generally; leadership skills; reflective practice; understanding how children learn and develop; the effects of disadvantage; the importance of the home learning environment and supporting transitions. Further, a greater emphasis should be placed on linking theory and research to practice and in particular to the adult role in supporting learning and development across all training modules. Future development of modules would best be supported by experts in training and module development at the required levels, for example by the Open University. Finally, clear models and examples of effective practice within the Foundation Phase across the sector need to be identified and made available and accessible. Dissemination of information and

examples of best practice could be made available on a Foundation Phase website as long as it is readily accessible and regularly updated. Accessibility and being kept up to date were common complaints by teachers and practitioners of the website in the MEEIFoundation Phase project (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2006) which would need to be avoided if this were to be effective.

The following section breaks down the training and recommendations designed to support the implementation and consolidation of the Foundation Phase. In two sub-sections, it considers the implications for training at the 1) LA/consortia and leadership level and then 2) Teacher/practitioner level. It is worth noting that these levels and recommendations are not mutually exclusive and there is a deal of overlap so both sections should be considered together to ensure that nothing is missed.

### **Break down of Training (and associated work) needed to support the implementation of the Foundation Phase**

#### **1. Consortia/LA and leaders training:**

Strategic leaders within the country as well as leaders of consortia/LAs, maintained schools and non-maintained settings should receive training that will support them in understanding how important the Foundation Phase of education is, not only for the children and families but also for the future of the country. They should be supported to recognise how effective implementation of the Foundation Phase can support the Welsh aspiration to 'improve the life chances and outcomes of all children in Wales' (DfES, 2013a). In conjunction with this they need to have a clear understanding of the principles and practices within the Foundation Phase so that they can recognise and promote them.

They need to be confident in their understanding and have a familiarity with the Foundation Phase so that they can support the process of identification and promotion of maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings which exemplify excellent practice. Identified providers could then model effective implementation of the Foundation Phase across the age range (3-7) opening their doors to visits as well as informing training with contextualised explicit examples of Foundation Phase pedagogy and practice.

Finally, these leaders need to be secure in their own leadership and team building skills. They should be offered leadership skills training that will support them in leading effective, collaborative teams who will then be able to move their practice forward, embracing continuous self-improvement processes that support the implementation and consolidation of the Foundation Phase.

4	<i>Consider compulsory training for leaders' across the sector including strategic leaders in the Country, consortia, primary head teachers, advisory staff, leaders of funded non-maintained settings and services to support their understanding of the principles and practices of the Foundation Phase. The training should be bespoke to the audience taking into account their history and previous experiences and include research showing how effective implementation of the Foundation Phase can support standards and impact on social and economic growth generally.</i>
3	Identify settings/schools of excellence to support continued professional development (CPD) and training of all staff. Identify methods of sharing best practice between maintained schools and all non-maintained settings and vice versa.
15	<i>Develop specific bespoke training on leadership designed to support leaders across the sector, both within maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings, but especially including primary head teachers</i>

## 2. Teacher/Practitioner Training

All teachers/practitioners need a good understanding of the principles and practices of the Foundation Phase as this is key to the successful learning and development of the children. This would include a working knowledge of experiential learning, meaningful projects that interest children, planning and assessment to ensure progression of skills across the Foundation Phase and an appropriate balance between focussed and independent learning, developing a play based, experiential pedagogy and providing an enriched and interesting environment within, outside and beyond the classroom based on children's interests. Staff should feel confident in delivering the Foundation Phase having a good understanding of child development and how children learn and develop. They need to be confident to critically reflect on their work and the implementation of the Foundation Phase, interpreting the curriculum to suit their children and families and the culture within their schools/settings rather than merely implementing it (Munton et al, 2002). In order to accomplish this more and rigorous training will need to be developed across Wales. In addition, examples of exemplary practice in maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings to act as models and for others to visit would augment this learning.

In relation to literacy and numeracy training, staff need guidance on supporting speaking and listening skills, emergent literacy and numeracy, linking learning to interests and allowing children to understand the purpose and function of literacy and

numeracy. Staff need guidance on how best to support language, literacy and numeracy development through both independent and focussed learning activities. They need to understand how to organise the environment to provide numerous opportunities for children to practice their language, literacy and numeracy at an appropriate level for them. In addition, they need to feel confident to teach aspects of literacy and numeracy at the appropriate levels and to support parents/carers in developing their children's literacy and numeracy in the home learning environment. They need to feel confident in what to do, for example using songs and nursery rhymes to support phonological awareness through rhymes and alliteration, so that as they do this they can also draw children's attention to it.

In relation to the LNF, training should emphasise the importance of the individual assessment of the children's skills and abilities to ensure that the education and care is appropriate and suits their learning and development needs. The teaching and learning should be led by the children and their needs and not the outcomes. The LNF guidance for young children needs to be appropriate to the children's needs and include encouraging staff to support children playing with words and sounds, songs and rhymes and develop their mathematical skills as they arrive naturally and meaningfully.

Staff need support and training to understand the role disadvantage can play in children and families' lives and how they can work to prevent some long term effects. They need training to build empathy and allow them to recognise any exclusionary attitudes they may have, they also need training to support them in understanding how they might make a difference, how they might build relationships and engage children and parents in the Foundation Phase.

Teachers/practitioners across the Foundation Phase and beyond (both prior to the Foundation Phase for example Flying Start and childcare staff and into Key Stage 2) need to work together to ensure smooth transitions for the children and families. Joint training could prepare for and examine both the effects of and how best to support transitions. In relation to the transfer of information between non-maintained settings and maintained schools, Wales is in the process of designing a national assessment tool (EYDAF) spanning the Foundation Phase. Once this is introduced it should be accompanied by training designed to support its use. Such training should emphasise teacher and practitioner assessment and will require training in the use of observation as a way of measuring impact and children's progress, as well as supporting ongoing and future teaching and learning. It will require additional training to ensure that all relevant staff are familiar with it, that moderation is rigorous and to ensure all staff are equally competent. Due to their differing backgrounds and levels of qualifications staff in non-maintained settings may require additional support/further qualifications to ensure that they are equipped to measure progress in this way.

With the introduction of the Foundation Phase, and its extension into Years 1 and 2 together with the change in ratios, many teachers in maintained schools are now

also leaders of practice within their own classrooms. In addition, many practitioners (in the non-maintained sector) and Foundation Phase co-ordinators (in maintained schools) have huge leadership and management responsibilities, many of whom have never had the benefit of any leadership or management training. Recognising and supporting these leaders through leadership training should support the effective deployment of staff (including TAs), the building of cohesive teams, support staff retention and career progression, enhance children’s learning and support relationships within and beyond the Foundation Phase. It should also support a culture of continuous self-assessment and improvement within the Foundation Phase.

Finally, it may be necessary to develop additional training for funded and unfunded non-maintained staff and TAs as appropriate. This may include literacy and numeracy training for those who may require it within the Foundation Phase.

5	<i>Ensure that all modules/training are underpinned by theory and research making clear the value of effective early education. Links between theory and practice and the important role of the adult need to be explicit.</i>
6	<i>Develop training that emphasises and exemplifies the progression of skills across the Foundation Phase. Models of effective implementation of the Foundation Phase should be shared and evaluated across the entire age range. Ensure these models and examples are readily available for individual maintained schools and non-maintained settings to access (perhaps on line and/or to visit).</i>
7	Consider all three year old children’s entitlement to high quality early education and care wherever their parents choose to place them. Additional training (including mentoring from a qualified teacher) and resources may be needed in funded and unfunded non-maintained settings to ensure equity of experience.
8	<i>Develop training that ensures all staff have a good understanding of how language, literacy and numeracy develop and how to support children’s development across the Foundation Phase including the important role of the adult.</i>
9	<i>Develop training which includes clear guidance and examples of how the LNF fits within the Foundation Phase, 3-4 and 5-7. For example in the 3-4 guidance how songs and nursery rhymes can emphasise understanding of sounds in rhyme and alliteration.</i>
11	<i>Consider supporting progression and continuity throughout the Foundation Phase by developing some additional training and guidance to the LNF on practice in language, literacy and numeracy for 3 and 4 year olds, ensuring this is appropriate for these children. It should follow their individual learning and development needs, and fit with the experiential Foundation Phase philosophy and practice.</i>

12	<i>Develop training that ensures all staff understand the research on the effects of disadvantage and poverty and the possible ways to close the achievement gap. Sharing good practice from those maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings where this is working well should be part of the training and so should research on supporting the home learning environment (HLE). Maintained schools could be asked to devote some of their Pupil Deprivation Grant (or similar) to support staff development here.</i>
13	<i>Consider strengthening transition arrangements through training all staff involved in them together (staff from all non-maintained settings, Flying Start, Foundation Phase staff, Key Stage 2 staff etc). Training should include current research and theory together with practical examples of good transition practice.</i>
14	Continue to develop (through EYDAF) and then implement an assessment profile which takes into account practitioners' skills. Ensuring that this profile continues throughout the Foundation Phase (ages 3-7) and that any standardised components are moderated. Assessment of the youngest children should be confined to observational teacher/practitioner assessments. Standardised elements would best be placed at age 5 (serving as a baseline) and the end of the Foundation Phase at age 7.
15	<i>Develop specific bespoke training on leadership designed to support leaders across the sector, both within maintained schools and non-maintained settings, but especially including primary head teachers.</i>
17	Ensure that TAs benefit from CPD processes and support within maintained schools and that literacy and numeracy training is available for those that need it. Develop a career path for those practitioners working in the funded non-maintained settings and for TAs within maintained schools. Promote these opportunities and review the terms and working conditions of TAs to attract well-qualified staff.

## **Appendix 3: Examples of possible strategic planning group members**

Representative from Estyn

Representative from CSSW

Representative from All Wales Foundation Phase Advisors

Representative from umbrella associations supporting non-maintained settings

Senior System leaders from each Consortia

DfE representatives e.g. Curriculum group, Assessment group and Early Years Dept.

Representatives from Higher Education e.g. Initial Teacher Training, Masters in Education Practice

Academics who understand research and evaluation evidence

Lead of services for children and families re supporting children and families from low socio-economic backgrounds e.g. Head of Deprivation

Principal Educational Psychologist

Head Teachers and leaders of funded non-maintained settings known to be implementing the Foundation Phase well

Beyond Wales early childhood education experts (e.g. key inspectors or academics from across UK)

## Appendix 4: Questions taken from an example questionnaire used in the stocktake

We are interested in your views and those of your colleagues, so if you wish to make a composite response please do so. Please detail your role and name (if you are happy to provide it) here, and, if appropriate, colleagues' roles and the total number of people who responded. All information will be treated as confidential.

We are gathering evidence across the Foundation Phase and therefore it would be helpful if you would indicate which type of setting/school(s) your information refers to: Please Note: If you find that any questions or parts of questions are inappropriate for you to answer, please note this and then move to the next question.

1. What are the key features (active learning, play pedagogy, indoor/outdoor environments, mix of child and adult initiated and led activities, planning, assessment, parent partnership etc.) of good/excellent implementation of the Foundation Phase?

Are these key features the same across the whole age range?

- Funded non-maintained settings serving 3-4 year olds
- Maintained schools serving 3-4 year olds (including those that are part of a primary school)
- Maintained schools serving 5-7 year olds (primary schools)

2. In your experience what does best practice in supporting children's language development look like in the Foundation Phase?

Where best practice is NOT evident, what is preventing this?

3. What difference has the implementation of the Foundation Phase made?

Please give examples and indicate which ages they apply to.

- a) To the children's learning outcomes.
- b) For children (other than to their learning outcomes), families and staff.

4. In your experience what does best practice in supporting children and families from areas of disadvantage look like in the Foundation Phase?

Where best practice is NOT evident, what is preventing this?

5. Consider your experiences of the implementation of the literacy and numeracy frameworks in the Foundation Phase.

- a) Please give examples of Literacy Framework best practice.
- b) Please give examples of Numeracy Framework best practice.

6. Should suitable versions of the literacy and numeracy frameworks, with an emphasis on emergent literacy and numeracy, be introduced for 3-4 year olds?

7. Please describe how the Foundation Phase supports transitions into, out of and within settings/schools?

8. How would you suggest children's progression within the Foundation Phase should best be demonstrated? Please give examples.

9. How, in your experience, do the qualifications of teachers/practitioners impact on the quality of the implementation of the Foundation Phase? Please give examples across the age range where appropriate.

10. In your experience, do newly qualified teachers implement the Foundation Phase well? Please give examples across the age range where appropriate.  
What if anything would you recommend newly qualified teachers need in their initial training and beyond to support them?

11. What impact has employing additional adults in Foundation Phase schools and settings had?

12. Foundation Phase teachers and practitioners have told us that the current ratios are about right for 3-4, 5-6 and 6-7 year olds but that with 4-5 year olds (reception classes) the ratios could be increased slightly (1 to 10) so that money could be diverted to hiring more qualified staff. Do you agree with this?

13. In your experience, what are the main characteristics of effective leaders in the Foundation Phase? Please give examples across the age range where appropriate.

14. Estyn's (2011) report found that in some schools the leaders did not understand the principles and practices of the Foundation Phase. What would you suggest to improve leadership in the Foundation Phase?

15. Please describe any elements of CPD or other training/opportunities for Development that have supported the implementation of the Foundation Phase.

16. Are there any aspects of training/opportunities for development missing which you believe are important? Do some types of settings/school require different training?

17. How has the move from LA implementation of the Foundation Phase to Consortia working influenced the implementation of the Foundation Phase? How could this be improved?

18. From your unique position what would you consider to be the most significant barrier to the successful implementation of the Foundation Phase?

19. What would you suggest to improve the implementation of the Foundation Phase?

a) in the short term.

b) in the longer term.

20. Is there any other information that you think would be important to the implementation of the Foundation Phase that the stocktake should consider?