

## Tell us whether you accept cookies

We use [cookies to collect information](#) about how you use GOV.UK. We use this information to make the website work as well as possible and improve government services.

Accept all cookies

Set cookie preferences

 GOV.UK

Search



The UK has left the EU

[Hide message](#)

[Find out what this means for you](#)

[Home](#) > [Consultation response regarding Early Years reforms](#)



Correspondence

# Ofqual response to DfE consultation on reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage

Published 5 February 2020

## Early Years Foundation Stage reforms - Ofqual consultation response

In regulating national assessments, Ofqual's objectives are to promote standards and confidence in statutory early years and primary assessments. More information on Ofqual's specific national assessments powers and duties can be found in our [national assessments regulatory framework](#). Our key concern is that assessments should be valid; this response provides a view on aspects of the consultation that relate to the validity of the proposed arrangements for the revised Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP). Our response does not consider

proposals that fall outside our remit, such as those relating to curriculum or accountability policy.

We welcome the Early Years Foundation Stage Reforms consultation, which gives stakeholders, including early years practitioners, teachers, schools, parents, and assessment and subject experts the opportunity to give their views. We likewise recognise the productive engagement we have had with the Early Years team on assessment validity and look forward to continuing to provide technical advice in this area through the final stages of the development and roll-out of the revised Profile.

## Assessment purpose

Clarity over the purpose of an assessment, and how its outcomes should be used, drives good assessment design and is a necessary building block supporting effective assessment processes and valid outcomes. We welcome that there is a statement of the purpose and use of the EYFSP assessment in the consultation document, namely:

“ The primary purpose of the EYFSP assessment is to support individual children’s successful transition from the EYFS to year 1... The EYFSP also provides a national and local population-level assessment of child development at age 5, including attainment for particular groups... It is not used as an accountability measure for schools. (page 24, [consultation document](#)).”

We would strongly recommend that such a purpose and use statement is included in key EYFSP documents to provide clarity throughout the lifetime of the assessment.

## Use of assessment outcomes

The purpose statement (above) sets out how assessment outcomes should and should not be used. We welcome the clear statement that outcomes of this teacher assessment should not be used for accountability purposes: the EYFSP, both currently and as revised, is not designed to be capable of withstanding the pressure of high-stakes use. Nonetheless, pressures may be placed on the revised (and current) Profile assessment through other means; there may be incentives to depress or inflate outcomes through informal or internal mechanisms. To help ensure outcomes are used in line with the assessment’s purpose and design, we would recommend three key steps. First, a review of how government as a whole uses and presents school-level EYFSP data to ensure this is always consistent with its low-stakes purpose and design. Secondly, very clear communications and guidance to schools, governing boards and other key stakeholders on how data from the EYFSP assessment should and should not be

used. Finally, we would also recommend ongoing monitoring of how EYFSP data is used in practice. Such measures should help minimise the risk that the assessment is used for purposes for which it was not designed and should support greater validity.

## Consistency of interpretation

We welcome the [piloting and independent evaluation](#) of the revised EYFSP. We note the pilot evaluation suggests a number of assessment criteria (Early Learning Goals and the statements within them) which teachers appear to be either interpreting in different ways or unclear about how to interpret. To help ensure the Profile meets its stated aim of providing data for national and local monitoring, we would recommend further consideration of the wording of assessment criteria (Early Learning Goals and the statements within them) where there is currently evidence of confusion or inconsistency which could undermine validity. This could include areas highlighted in responses to the present consultation and areas highlighted in the evaluation, such as Early Learning Goals in writing and personal, social and emotional development (including self-regulation).

Whether or not local authority moderation remains, we would recommend further consideration of the support for teachers that may be proportionate to achieve sufficient consistency in interpreting the criteria, thus securing a sufficiently valid national and local dataset. If local authority moderation is to be removed but is not replaced with other mechanisms for supporting consistency, this presents risks to the validity of outcomes. As this will be a new assessment, the provision of national training for teachers using the assessment is likely to be useful. Similarly, we agree that the development of high quality, relevant exemplification materials is important to ensuring a clear and consistent understanding of how to interpret the Early Learning Goals. We would advise that such materials provide exemplars for each Goal, both just below and just above the 'expected' standard and across the Profile as a whole, as decisions in threshold cases are often the most difficult consistently to assess. Evidence from the pilot evaluation will also be helpful in determining content areas, scenarios and other aspects to target within exemplification and training, such as the assessment of children with special educational needs and disabilities. In line with issues raised in the evaluation, we would also recommend that clearer guidance is provided to teachers about how the 'best-fit' nature of the Early Learning Goals should be interpreted. For example, to what extent must all of the statements within a Goal be met in order for the Goal as a whole to be met? To what extent must each of the specified Goals be met in order to achieve a 'Good Level of Development'?

In line with our response to the primary assessment consultations in 2017, we welcome careful consideration of whether the current grade descriptors ('emerging', 'expected' and 'exceeding') are appropriate for meeting the assessment's purpose. Given that the primary purpose of the Profile is to assess school readiness – a binary decision – we recognise the merits of the proposal to

remove the 'exceeding' grade and retain the 'emerging' and 'expected' grade.

## **Use and interpretation of data during transition period**

The consultation proposes to make the revised Profile statutory from the academic year 2021-2022, with optional early adoption in the academic year 2020-2021. Pupils with different types of performance profile (different strengths and weaknesses) are likely to perform differently between the old and new Profiles, thus results cannot be plausibly compared between the two Profiles. It is not easy to predict implications for results of changes of this nature; results may change overall (go up or down) or remain broadly stable. Dependant on the number and nature of early adopters, comparisons across the two sets of assessments may be possible using statistical methods. However, this will need careful consideration and monitoring; it may not be possible to draw plausible conclusions about changes in pupil attainment between either 2020/21 and 2021/22, and/or 2021/22 and 2022/23. If this is the case, clear and careful messaging will be important to ensure outcomes are not misinterpreted.

## **Further research and evaluation**

Prior to statutory introduction of the new Profile, we would recommend further research and trialling of different approaches to ensuring ongoing consistency, such as different types of moderation, training and standardisation, including online approaches. This could inform the development of effective and proportionate on-going controls, including in the event that local authority moderation is to be removed. Such research could provide useful evidence upon which to make decisions that can secure the required level of reliability in datasets.

Finally, we recommend ongoing monitoring of the consistency with which new assessment criteria (Early Learning Goals) are being interpreted and applied, alongside monitoring of how outcomes are being used in schools. This area is likely to benefit from further research.

Ofqual 31 January 2020

# Transition period

---

[Find out what it means for you](#)

## Services and information

---

[Benefits](#)

[Births, deaths, marriages and care](#)

[Business and self-employed](#)

[Childcare and parenting](#)

[Citizenship and living in the UK](#)

[Crime, justice and the law](#)

[Disabled people](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

[Education and learning](#)

[Employing people](#)

[Environment and countryside](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

[Money and tax](#)

[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

## Departments and policy

---

[How government works](#)

[Departments](#)

[Worldwide](#)

[Services](#)

[Guidance and regulation](#)

[News and communications](#)

[Research and statistics](#)

[Policy papers and consultations](#)

[Transparency and freedom of information releases](#)

---

[Help](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookies](#) [Contact](#) [Accessibility statement](#) [Terms and conditions](#)

Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg Built by the [Government Digital Service](#)

**OGL** All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated



© Crown copyright