**Child centred model of assessment and planning**

A child centred approach promotes the right of the child to choose, make connections and communicate. It allows freedom for children to think, experience, explore, question and search for answers. It presents a creative celebration of children's work.

Practitioners take on a new role in seeing how play develops, rather than directing play; children therefore become more creative and enhance communication skills with one another. If you think back to your own childhood, what made a fantastic day was a really good play! When your mum let you turn the table upside down and you made it into a ship and sailed off to an imaginative land - you don't forget those things, these are the things that make you a creative person and an explorer of the world.

All children and young people are different and have different needs. Similarly, a family’s ability to respond to and meet all their needs may also differ. In some circumstances, professional assessment may be required to identify strengths and needs, to ensure that all children, young people and their families receive appropriate support.

Assessment can be defined as a systematic process of gathering a range of information relating to a child, to help identify their strengths and needs, in order to decide on appropriate further action (or to confirm that no additional help is required). Assessment can provide a baseline of information against which a child or young person’s future development can be measured. The information may be gathered from a wide range of sources.

**Assessment as part of a cycle**

Assessment must be part of a cycle. The assessment must inform planning, the plan must then be implemented, the implementation must then be reviewed, which may lead to further assessment. Assessment on its own – for its own sake – will not achieve effective change and support for children, young people and their families.

**The purpose of assessment**

Assessment may take place in a wide range of situations and for a variety of purposes, for example: A teacher’s or Early Years Educators assessment of a child’s educational attainment at key stages of the national curriculum (EYFS), to determine future learning plans.

* A paediatric assessment to ensure that a child has reached the appropriate developmental milestones and to monitor progress.
* A Connexions personal adviser’s assessment of a young person’s strengths and barriers to participation in learning to provide feedback and motivation.
* An educational psychologist’s assessment of a child or young person’s special educational needs to identify their educational strengths and needs.
* A social worker’s assessment of a child’s home situation, to determine if they are at risk of harm.

Each of these types of assessment has a clearly defined purpose and it is important to note that the role and function of assessment may vary according to the context.

**What is an assessment framework?**

What differentiates an assessment framework from being mere guidance is the inclusion of an explicit theoretical or conceptual underpinning. An assessment framework has the potential to provide guidance that is grounded in an evidence base and to facilitate consistency among assessors.

Common assessment should lead to a common approach to strengths and needs assessment. It should:

* Reduce the number of assessments that a child undergoes
* Break down professional boundaries
* Improve information sharing

Specialist assessments would build on this initial, common assessment. Linking information sharing and assessment will encourage a wider culture change across the children and young people’s workforce.

**Basic principles of effective assessment**

The purpose of effective assessment is:

* To gather information
* To identify strengths
* To identify needs
* To inform action

Assessment should follow the ‘nondeficit’ model or strengths/needs model, where focus is placed on a child or young person’s strengths and needs, rather than their weaknesses, as this has been shown to lead to more positive outcomes. However, issues and problems also need to be considered. The assessment process should be a positive experience and the practitioners should work with a child or young person, their parents/carers and other agencies, to gather information to establish the issues that need to be addressed and assess the most suitable response.

Assessments should be grounded in knowledge, i.e. theory, research findings and practice experience in which confidence can be placed to assist in the gathering of information, its analysis and the choice of intervention in formulating a plan.

Assessment should be:

* Consensual – the informed consent of the child/young person and /or parents/ carers should be obtained where possible, unless to do so places the child/ young person at risk of significant harm; in which case the decision should be recorded.
* Not discriminatory – based on equality of opportunity and taking into account disability, communication, gender, sexuality, cultural and racial needs. Personal information should always be dealt with in a sensitive and non-discriminatory manner.
* Sound – grounded in evidence based knowledge, current research and an understanding of human growth and development.
* Progressive – to build on existing information, from as many valid sources as possible. Assessments should build on strengths as well as identify needs.
* Sufficient and formative – to provide sufficient information to inform and support future planning.
* Continuous – an ongoing process rather than a one-off event i.e. an evolving picture growing with the child rather than a snapshot fixed in one point in time.
* Current – information should be valid and reliable.

Assessments should work to timescales and be solution and action focused. Appropriate services should be provided during the course of the assessment.

* Collaborative – one person should coordinate a multiagency
* Approach for information gathering and the provision of services.

There should be provision for active collaborative reflection by all parties.

* Transparent – work with families should be honest and open. The purpose should be clear to all. Children, young people and their parents/carers should have the opportunity to gain access to information held about them.

**Methods of assessment**

There are a range of methods that can be used for assessment.

Methods will vary in a number of ways:

* Some are oral, others are written
* Some use words, others are non-verbal
* Some may be measuring skills directly, others may be an indicator of potential abilities
* Some may be objective and quantifiable, whilst others may be subjective and qualitative.

Objective-An objective test/assessment is one for which the scoring procedure is completely specified enabling agreement among different scorers. e.g. a multiple choice, set answer test.

Subjective-A subjective test/assessment is one in which the impression or opinion of the assessor determines the score or evaluation of performance. e.g. a job interview.

Quantifiable/Quantitative-These are results that can, usually, be expressed in numbers. e.g. 75 correct out of a possible 90.

Qualitative-These are results that can, usually, not be expressed directly in numbers. E.g. An improvement in the effort made in lessons.

One to one interactions-structured and purposeful discussions with children, young people and their families are the most common approach in gathering information. They can be very effective but this depends a great deal on the skill of the practitioner. In addition, discussions are inherently subjective so are prone to bias. However, some form of interaction with children, young people and their families is essential for any effective assessment.

Gathering information from other sources. This involves getting information from other people and organisations that have been involved with the child/young person and/or their parent/carer in the past. It is important to gain as much information as possible from other sources. This data can help confirm data gathered by your own assessments and should prevent duplication of assessment. The information may contradict that gathered from your own assessments, and as such can act as a useful checking mechanism and a prompt to ask more questions and seek further information. However, it is important not to rely purely on information from other sources, as it may be out of date, or written from a perspective that may be misleading or out of context.

Self-assessment questionnaires - these allow children, young people and their families to rate/assess themselves against a set of criteria related to a need being measured.

Examples can include learning styles, self-esteem and coping strategies. These can form a vital part of the assessment process and facilitate structured input from the person being assessed. However, children, young people and their families may not always be objective about themselves. In addition, low levels of literacy can sometimes prevent the completion of self-assessments, so additional support may be needed or other types of assessment used.

Task/work samples - this allows information to be provided on the standard achieved in a set piece of work. Other factors like a person’s interest levels, strategies or techniques adopted and understanding of various concepts can be analysed. This can be carried out as a formal process or through informal discussions. The maximum benefit can be gained from these by using a task which is as close to a real life situation as possible.

Formalised assessment tests - these include psychometric tests and can provide important information about how children, young people and their families compare with others. These are usually paper and pencil based but increasingly interactive computer testing is coming into play.

Observation - this can provide important information for future discussion and goal setting. Assessment of social skills is one characteristic that can be looked at. The use of video is sometimes applied to the process.

Group Discussion - this can provide useful information on areas of interaction with others and personal effectiveness.

Dynamic Assessment - this is a quickly developing area of assessment. Learners are presented with increasingly explicit cues and prompts for performing a task. Support is limited by giving learners hints about the general approach to a particular problem or task. This could also involve providing a specific blueprint for solving the task. The number of hints given by the assessor for the learner to solve the problem serves as a measure of learning efficiency. The more ‘clues’ given the lower a young person’s ‘learning efficiency’. The dynamic assessment of learning efficiency focuses on how much help is needed for a learner to reach their learning potential in a given domain, rather than a ‘static’ measure of what has already been acquired.

**Observing & Recording**

To help children’s progress, practitioners need information about what the children know, understand and can do. Through observing children and young people at work/play, and by making notes when necessary about what has been achieved; practitioners can make professional judgements about their children’s achievements and decide on the next steps in learning.

They can also provide information for parents and carers about how children are progressing. By recognising the practitioner’s role in making judgements about their children’s progress and in deciding how much record keeping is necessary we enhance the professionalism of practitioners.

Practitioners who observe children’s learning, who strive to understand it and then put their understanding to good use, are effectively completing the “assessment for learning” cycle. Observations and assessments should be part of our daily practice in striving for quality!

**Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFS)**

The Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum is the statutory, end summative assessment to be completed by the end of a child’s Reception year. Recent expansion of funded provision for three and four year old children means that most children enter school having already spent considerable time in other early years settings such as yours

The Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum is an important aspect of the implementation of the foundation stage, which is now the only statutory stage of the national curriculum for pupils in England.

A key element of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum is that it sets out a way of summarising young children’s progress towards the Early Learning Goals and provides important information to parents and practitioners

Children’s progress towards the EYFS staged development indicators must be reported to parents at the end of the year.

The assessments based on observations will inform the children’s progress towards EYFS and EYFSP. This will ensure that every child leaves the foundation stage with their strengths acknowledged and celebrated and their needs and next steps in their learning clearly identified.