

BASELINE ASSESSMENT IN SCOTLAND: AN EVALUATION OF PILOT PROCEDURES

J. ERIC WILKINSON, SANDRA JOHNSON, JOYCE WATT, ANGELA NAPUK
AND BARBARA NORMAND

SYNOPSIS

Assessment of children's educational achievements in early childhood education has recently become a controversial issue, not least because of the expected dual purpose — pedagogic and managerial — of such assessments. This paper outlines the evaluation of a national pilot baseline assessment scheme in Scotland. Based on samples of pre-school staff (N = 38) and primary school teachers (N = 27), views were sought by means of a questionnaire about the operation and value of the scheme. In addition, interviews were conducted with six pre-school staff, nine primary school teachers and four headteachers. A majority of those who participated in the scheme welcomed the professional judgement approach but identified significant issues in consistency of interpretation and time taken to undertake the task. The findings are related to the responses to the Consultation Document on Assessment Pre-school and 5-14.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Baseline Assessment' has recently been introduced into the education systems of the United Kingdom. Baseline Assessment is undertaken on entry to formal schooling, normally in the first year of Primary School. It is regarded as having a dual purpose:

1. to provide information on children's educational attainment and help teachers plan effectively to meet children's individual learning needs (the pedagogic imperative);
2. to assess children's attainment, using one or more numerical outcomes which can be used in later value-added analysis of children's progress (the managerial imperative).

The origins of Baseline Assessment can be traced back to the concerns of the previous Conservative Government in its drive to raise educational standards. It emphasised the importance of establishing formal records of children's learning at the start of primary school as a means of assessing and improving standards. The Labour Government and, more recently, the Scottish Executive, have continued and extended the drive to raise standards by introducing a range of new initiatives in early childhood education (SOEID, 1998a; SO, 1999) such as the ambitious expansion of early years education and the funding of early intervention strategies.

The emphasis on assessment in the early years was an inevitable development of the national testing requirements in primary schools, starting in Scotland with Level A for 7/8 year old children. This requirement has brought assessment to the forefront of the debate about how best to help all children learn effectively at the start of their schooling careers. Parents, administrators and politicians now wish to be informed about the educational progress being made by children.

In England and Wales, Baseline Assessment became mandatory from September 1998 (1997 Education Act). In Northern Ireland legislation is planned (Worthington, 1998). In Scotland, the need for assessment of children on entry to primary school was identified by the Scottish Office Task Force on Underachievement in 1996. In

its report, the Task Force recommended that *a method of assessing children on entry to P1 should be devised* (SOEID, 1996, p.14).

In response to this recommendation two initial projects were commissioned by the Scottish Office: one to undertake a literature review of current practices in assessment on entry to school in other countries; the other, to ascertain current assessment and record-keeping practices in a representative sample of pre-school centres in Scotland. The results of this work have been reported in *Interchange No. 55* (Wilkinson, Watt, Napuk and Normand, 1998). These two preparatory projects were followed in 1997/98 by a third project, funded by the SEED, whose brief was to develop and pilot a baseline assessment scheme for use in pre-school centres and P1 classes (Wilkinson *et al.* 1999).

As far as the Scottish proposals for baseline assessment are concerned, it was regarded as essential that a systematic and rigorous approach be taken to the construction of the pilot scheme. The first stage was therefore to derive the instrument (referred to as the Child Record throughout this paper) and, secondly, to test its viability.

Of central importance in Baseline Assessment is the breadth of children's learning to be assessed. Some schemes focus almost exclusively on numeracy and literacy whilst others take a broad perspective across the whole curriculum (see Wilkinson and Napuk (1997) for further discussion of this issue). In devising the Scottish proposals, the latter approach was adopted as being more consistent both with the traditions of early childhood education in Scotland (Watt, 1990) and the principles of the 5-14 programme. It was also decided to adopt a professional judgement approach to assessment advocated by Blenkin & Kelly (1992) rather than rely on 'objective' tests *per se*. Again, this was recognised as being more consistent with the approach to record keeping on children's progress undertaken by early childhood professionals - teachers, nursery nurses and others.

Taking this approach gives priority to the first of the two purposes of Baseline Assessment, i.e. to help teachers plan effectively to meet children's individual learning needs (the pedagogic imperative). However, the second purpose (assessment of the 'value-added' by the school) had also to be addressed by the scheme developers, the Task Force on Underachievement in Scotland having recommended that action also be taken on developing value-added measurements (SOEID, 1996, p.15). Indeed, the desirability for value-added information has recently been further endorsed by the Scottish Executive (SEED, 1999). The two, possibly conflicting requirements, posed interesting challenges for the scheme developers.

The newly developed scheme was piloted in national samples of 46 pre-school centres and 27 primary schools during the spring term of 1998. The main purposes of piloting were to assess the manageability of the scheme in the practical classroom situation, as well as to gather the views of practitioners about the potential value of the scheme, both for their own programme planning and as an information tool to facilitate pre-school to P1 transfer. The pilot studies naturally provided empirical rating data for several hundred pre-school and P1 pupils, which also permitted some exploratory analysis pertinent to the issues of rating validity and reliability. Full details of the pilot studies and their findings are given in the research report (Wilkinson *et al.* 1999), while some of the empirical results are discussed in Wilkinson *et al.* (2001). The present paper focuses specifically on issues relating to instrument development, and also presents the results of the practitioners' scheme evaluation.

THE ASSESSMENT SCHEME AND PILOT PROCEDURES

The scheme was developed by a small group of experienced development officers working in collaboration with the research team.¹ It focused on the assessment of pupils with respect to each of eight 'Aspects of Learning':

- Personal, Emotional and Social Development
- Expressive Communication
- Physical Co-ordination
- Listening and Talking
- Reading
- Writing
- Mathematics
- Understanding the Environment

These eight Aspects of Learning were identified by the scheme's development officers as mapping onto both a *Curriculum Framework for Children in their Pre-school Year* (SOEID, 1997) and the *5-14 National Curriculum Guidelines* (SOEID, 1993), thereby providing a common language interface between pre-school staff and P1 teachers and supporting continuity and breadth of learning outcomes across the curriculum. Pupils' development within each Aspect of Learning was assumed to be reflected in demonstration of relevant skills and behaviours, and in evidence of knowledge acquisition and conceptual understanding. The development officers attempted to identify appropriate skills, knowledge and behaviours within each Aspect of Learning, which they termed 'Features'. The choice of the term 'Features' was made in order to avoid the perception amongst the raters that the Features were merely a list of criteria to be summated, i.e. a tick-list. It was hoped that by using the terms 'Features', the raters would be encouraged to adopt a best-fit approach when assessing each child.

The scheme was originally developed for use at P1, where for logistic reasons the pilot survey was conducted before the related survey at the pre-school stage. After much debate within the research and development team, it was agreed that for trialling purposes, and bearing in mind the value-added imperative, all the P1 Features would be included in the pre-school version of the scheme. Those Features which the development officers considered not of direct relevance to most children at the pre-school stage were separated from the rest by a dotted line. Only for *Listening & Talking* were there no 'below-the-line' Features. A handful of Features were added into the pre-school version, which had not been included in the P1 version. A complete list of Features within the eight Aspects of Learning is given in the Annex.

Use of the assessment scheme required teachers first to rate each of their pupils in terms of their demonstration of each of the Features. In the trials, teachers were requested to use colour coding to indicate their judgments about Feature demonstration: green for 'readily observable', yellow for 'observable only in some contexts', and red for 'definitely not evident'. When they had completed the set of Feature ratings for a child they were then to classify the child into one of four Aspect attainment groups, using a 'best fit' approach with respect to the following statements:

- The child displays very few of these Features. Immediate investigation and structured intervention are essential. (Rating - 1)
- The child displays some of these Features. Most others require attention and planned support. (Rating - 2)
- The child displays the majority of these Features successfully and is making good progress with most of the others. (Rating - 3)
- The child displays almost all of these Features consistently and with confidence. (Rating - 4)

Briefing workshops were organised for the teachers who took part in the pilot surveys and detailed Notes of Guidance were prepared to help staff undertake the assessments. The support of the development officers and researchers was made available to them throughout the assessment phase. The Notes of Guidance included information on how to complete the record for each child, a list of suggested contexts for each Aspect of Learning and an elaboration of each Feature. To give examples of contexts, in the case of *Physical Co-ordination* the following contexts were identified for pre-school staff: organisation and use of toys; resources and equipment; care of personal belongings; road safety; snack time; outdoor play time; play/activity areas; circle time; experience of visits/visitors; celebrations and festivals. For *Mathematics* at the pre-school stage we have: nesting toys; imaginative play; sand/water play; shopping activities; building blocks; counting/number games; wall displays and charts.

As mentioned earlier, the P1 pilot involved 27 primary schools, while the pre-school pilot was conducted in 46 local authority nursery schools and classes, private nurseries and voluntary pre-school centres. While the pre-school establishments varied considerably in size, the number of children being assessed in the pilot did not exceed 20 in any one place. In total, assessments were completed for 584 P1 pupils and 628 pre-school children.

The two pupil samples closely resembled each other (and their respective populations) in all demographic respects, with the obvious exception of age. The majority of pupils were white Caucasian (94% of the pre-schoolers and 93% of the P1 pupils) and native English speakers (96% of pre-schoolers and 94% of P1 pupils). Just under half were first born children (48% of the pre-schoolers and 47% of P1 pupils), and 20% were only children. 87% of the pupils in each sample were right-handed. A small proportion at each stage were registered as having special educational needs (6% of pre-schoolers and 8% of P1 pupils). 28% of P1 pupils were entitled to free school meals, which compares with a national figure of 22% in primary and nursery schools in 1997-98 (SOEID, 1998b).

EVALUATION OF THE PILOT PROCEDURES

Since the assessment scheme was totally dependent on the professional judgement of practitioners in their own settings, any evaluation had to rely heavily on practitioner perceptions of the task, its content, processes and outcomes. The perceptions were accessed by a substantial questionnaire to all those who completed the assessment task, supplemented by interviews with a sub-sample. All staff were asked to keep a rough but regular 'diary' of any particular problems, insights or issues which arose in the implementation of the assessments and which they thought were worth noting. The questionnaire covered:

- the general approach to Baseline Assessment
- staff involvement in the pilot procedures
- the content of the record
- the assessment process
- staff support
- the value of the assessments
- the possible role of parents
- recommendations and conclusions

At P1 all 27 teachers completed the questionnaire and 38 out of 46 questionnaires were returned from pre-school staff (teachers, nursery nurses and playgroup leaders).

Interviews were held with nine teachers and four headteachers of nine of the primary schools involved in the P1 pilot, and with staff of six pre-school groups. The following section summarises the findings from both the questionnaire and the interviews.

Staff attitudes to the general approach and to their own involvement

The majority of respondents in both groups welcomed the general approach (92% of P1 teachers and 79% of pre-school staff). Its strength for them was that it was based on the on-going learning and teaching activities of the classroom. Of those who welcomed the approach, over a third said that they valued the approach because the whole child was being assessed, because it was based on professional judgements, and because it did not involve 'testing' children. Pre-school practitioners in particular appreciated the fact that the Record covered the whole range of learning. A few mentioned its clarity, its structure, its uniformity across settings and its emphasis on staff collaboration:

Makes good use of sound observations by staff and is very valid for showing where the child is at a given time.

Three of the primary head teachers that were interviewed liked the general approach:

I like this scheme because of its philosophic position. Although it contains a lot of ambiguities, it is part of a learning and teaching strategy, is not in any sense a threat and provides an opportunity to build on what is already being done. It's the kind of thing we'd want to use.

The one head teacher who was negative was particularly critical of the fact that the scheme did not provide what she understood as 'baseline' information. She was sceptical of the intention to build on pre-school assessments as she saw the latter as 'idealistic' and 'overestimating children's ability'. This head teacher thought that primary schools needed a Baseline Assessment at the *beginning* of P1.

There was considerable variety in the formal qualifications of practitioners in the pre-school centres, and the questionnaire responses of some of them often reflected unease or lack of confidence in their own ability to carry out the assessment adequately. Seven of the pre-school staff who returned the questionnaire confessed to feeling daunted not only by the scale of the project but also by the degree of professional expertise required to complete the assessment properly. A playgroup leader commented: *I felt out of my depth but I collaborated with my colleague*. The assessment was conscientiously tackled in all cases, however.

There were some reservations among pre-school staff in particular about formal assessment of children at this stage: *I cannot help but feel the children are being labelled in the attainment statements section and we are one step away from 'grading' them at this early stage*. The main weakness of the system in the opinion of several pre-school practitioners was that the Record seemed impersonal and had no place to indicate progress: *...child comes out as a tick rather than an individual* (21%). Other weaknesses mentioned were teacher variability (16%), the negativity of the Attainment Statements (13%), the scale of the task (8%) and some particular items of content.

Content of the Record

Both P1 teachers and pre-school staff were generally very positive about the Record itself (greater than 80% in both groups), although inevitably there were many constructive suggestions for change. Almost all practitioners considered the Record 'user friendly' (89%), and high proportions thought the Aspect coverage about right and that the overall balance correct (81%).

The Features were on the whole thought to be relevant to their pupils by most of the practitioners. The exception was in the area of *Writing*. Nearly half of the P1 teachers (44%) were critical of a number of Features in this Aspect of Learning. Some respondents thought a distinction should be made between what children did not know or could not do, and what they had not yet been taught. Some also felt that the range of Features was too ambitious, and the content of some too detailed and too advanced. Almost half the P1 teachers wanted to add Features, most commonly for *Expressive Communication*, while almost three quarters wanted some of the given Features to be omitted, most commonly for *Physical Co-ordination*. Half the pre-school participants made comments, always positive, about the system of highlighting Features. However, 5% suggested that a large amount of red might alarm parents.

Over three quarters of P1 teachers (78%) thought the Attainment Statements were easy to understand, clearly linked to the Features, and useful to the teachers and school. As a group they were divided on ease of completion, and on whether they were being asked for a 'best fit' approach or a quantitative assessment. Some found the distinctions between Statements 2 and 3 difficult to apply.

The Attainment Statements were much less positively viewed by the pre-school staff, almost two thirds of whom expressed grave reservations about them. 40% suggested that they were very negative or even alarmist, and needed amendment. A small number suggested that the Feature highlighting might eliminate any need for Attainment Statements.

Approximately half of the pre-school practitioners commented that the Record appeared very impersonal, and recommended adequate space for comments and personal details. Although the language used in the Record and accompanying teachers' notes is similar to that found in the Curriculum Guidelines, a few pre-school practitioners were unfamiliar with the style and confused by it. Some also thought it might be difficult for parents to understand (10%).

Six P1 teachers responsible for children with particular influences on their capacity to demonstrate their abilities (Special Educational Needs, Gaelic medium children and children for whom English was an additional language) were also generally positive about the Record, but argued for specific changes to accommodate their own children (see later section).

The assessment process and teacher support

Most practitioners in both groups claimed that they were interested in and/or excited at the opportunity to be involved in a national pilot on an important issue, when they were first asked to be involved but prior to implementation (greater than 75% in both groups). Some felt daunted and rather uncertain. However, just one P1 teacher was unwilling at the start to be involved. Despite their general approval of the approach, a small number of the practitioners had reservations at this pre-implementation stage, mainly related to teacher variability in the interpretation of the task. A few suspected the task was too big and one or two queried whether the range of Aspects covered was justified.

After having implemented the scheme, most P1 teachers claimed that their attitudes had not fundamentally changed (63%). This compares with nearly half the pre-school staff (45%). Where attitudes had changed, the changes were almost all positive and were described in terms of 'better understanding', 'worthwhileness' and 'reassurance'. Some of the practitioners claimed to be more positive when they understood the task better and saw it as generally worthwhile. A few became more negative when they realised the scale of what was involved.

The P1 teachers indicated that the approximate time it took them to complete one Record ranged from 15 to 90 minutes, compared with 15 minutes to three and a half

hours for the pre-school staff (most recorded a time of 25 to 30 minutes). A majority of those interviewed commented unfavourably on the amount of time required to undertake the assessments but said the task became quicker as they became more used to the process.

Almost all the respondents agreed that they were able to find evidence to substantiate their assessments through observation, through analysing children's work, through their general knowledge of the children and, overall, by using their professional judgement. About one third of the pre-school staff claimed that the information was already available to them and that *this is similar to our own assessments*.

Well over half the P1 teachers claimed that *Mathematics* was the easiest Aspect on which to find evidence, while around a third claimed that *Personal, Emotional and Social Development* was the easiest. Finding evidence for *Understanding the Environment* and *Expressive Communication* proved problematic for almost half of them. Among the pre-school staff, two thirds found the Features in *Personal, Emotional and Social Development* the easiest for which to gather evidence, while one third found *Physical Co-ordination* easiest. Finding evidence for *Understanding the Environment* and *Mathematics* proved more difficult for about one third of the group.

Almost all the respondents in both groups found the assessment demanding. Just over half the P1 teachers reported that they did not find the exercise 'manageable' or 'reasonable' in terms of their other classroom responsibilities, given the short time-scale involved. In contrast, despite the demands made, the majority of pre-school practitioners claimed to find the process both manageable and reasonable within the course of their daily activities. The lower child:staff ratios in pre-school establishments probably explains this difference.

In response to a question about the degree of support offered by the teachers' notes in implementing the whole assessment process, well over three quarters of the P1 teachers and all but two of the pre-school staff agreed that they had found the notes to be generally clear, helpful and sufficiently detailed. But there were many constructive suggestions about how the notes could be clarified and some of the ambiguities resolved. Virtually all argued that if the whole process were to be reliable, teachers' notes with full accompanying exemplars and a programme of staff development would be vital.

At a pre-implementation briefing meeting teachers were offered the possibility of on-going advice and support from the research and development team, as they implemented the assessments during subsequent weeks. Over three quarters of P1 teachers said that this support had been very helpful. Colleagues who gave support in the school were usually subject specialists, the head teacher, senior teacher or AHT. Their involvement usually took the form of assessing certain Aspects, supplying information, or giving advice, general support or a second opinion. This support both lightened the load and provided new insights on children.

Almost all the pre-school staff had also benefited from the support of colleagues, about three quarters by support from the research and development team, and over half by support from parents. During the assessment they had been variously assisted by other class teachers, auxiliaries, playground supervisors, care assistants, classroom assistants, students or nursery nurses. The assistance given ranged from general support, to specific information, to help with the actual assessment. A few pre-school practitioners said they would have welcomed more support from parents.

Almost all the P1 teachers and most of the pre-school staff would have welcomed extra cover, particularly "*if the task were to be done properly*". Most acknowledged that the pilot had put particular stress on them as it had had to be completed in a very short time and because the whole process was new. However, given the opportunity to integrate the assessments within the ongoing curriculum over a period of time,

most felt it would be 'manageable'. A few still insisted, however, that even in those circumstances extra cover would be needed.

A number of P1 teachers felt strongly that any form of Baseline Assessment carried out in March would have to dovetail in some way with Reporting to Parents, required as part of the 5 to 14 programme and due to be completed in the summer term.

Some participants in the P1 pilot made it clear that they felt pre-school practitioners might be too generous in their assessment of pre-school children. For their part, the pre-school practitioners were not unaware of potential problems in this regard. Throughout the pre-school establishments there were concerns that the range of training and experience of pre-school practitioners might lead to inconsistency in the interpretation of Features and Attainment Statements, and in how to apply them. It was clear that some felt staff who were not professionally trained might lack confidence in completing the assessments or might not apply the Features or Attainment Statements in the same way:

I am not discriminating against the voluntary/private sectors but I worry about the range of qualified and unqualified staff in these sectors and the variety of expertise and experience completing these profiles.

And concerns were expressed about the difficulty of consistent interpretation:

Even within our nursery with only two teachers the various assessments were tackled very differently. When looking at 3D shapes I asked, 'What is this shape called?' My fellow teacher said, 'Point to the sphere.' One obviously requires more knowledge than the other.

The value of the assessments

Participants were asked whether in doing the assessments they had come to see their class or any individual child differently. Only six out of the 27 P1 teachers said that they viewed their class any differently. One teacher interviewed, however, made the point:

I found that children could do more than I realised. In big classes, because teachers work in groups, they develop a 'group attitude', and make assumptions about children in the group that perhaps are not warranted.

One very enthusiastic teacher had been quite taken aback to realise just how poor were her children's language skills.

Just under half of each practitioner group claimed that they had learned something new about a particular child. They had either found surprising strengths or had uncovered unsuspected weaknesses:

I was surprised at what some children were capable of in certain areas, e.g. music, when my attention was focused.

For some this had been quite a profound professional learning experience.

Participants were also asked to identify what they saw as the particular strengths and weaknesses of the approach for the child, the class, the parent, the teacher, the school and the education authority. At least half the respondents in each group thought that the value for the child was that it highlighted the child's strengths and weaknesses, for the class it identified areas of the curriculum for development, for the parent it provided an all-round picture of their child's progress, and could be useful as a basis for discussion, and for the school it helped planning and monitoring. The most common value cited for teachers, by around a third of respondents, was its function for planning and recording; pre-school staff anticipated the value of the information for P1 teachers' planning as well as for their own. The few who

responded in relation to the education authority saw Baseline Assessment as aiding decision-making in the allocation of resources.

Most P1 teachers could not identify weaknesses for the child or the class in this approach, although a few mentioned that it might detract from teaching time. Some of the pre-school staff, however, felt it moved into formal assessment too soon. Around a third of P1 teachers and many pre-school staff felt that parents might be overwhelmed by the detail of the record, and that it might appear too negative in some cases. A few mentioned the danger of parents comparing their children with others. Teachers and pre-school practitioners were quick to identify weaknesses in the approach in relation to themselves; over half saw the time involved and the implications for lost teaching time as the main weakness. Some pre-school staff saw the impersonal nature and length of the Record, along with its ambiguities, as potential problems for the P1 teachers to whom it would be transferred.

Only a minority of respondents mentioned weaknesses in relation to the school or the education authority. Where these were mentioned they revolved around issues of cost and resources.

Finally, participants were asked about the value of the scheme in terms of its reliability and validity. Asked the direct question about whether they saw the Baseline Assessment procedures as reliable and valid, 20 out of the 27 P1 teachers (74%) and 30 of the 38 pre-school staff (79%) said that in their opinion it was both reliable and valid. Three P1 teachers agreed validity but not reliability, whereas two pre-school practitioners agreed reliability but not validity. Two P1 teachers and three pre-school practitioners thought the procedures neither valid nor reliable. Two P1 teachers and three pre-school staff opted not to respond to the question.

The majority perceptions of reliability, while welcome, sit somewhat uneasily with earlier reservations on teacher variability expressed before the assessment was undertaken, with retrospective arguments for clearer teacher notes and with comments from teacher interviews.

The role and perceptions of parents

It was always the assumption of the research and development team that the Baseline Assessment programme would involve parents in some way. However, given the pressures teachers were under to complete the assessments in a very limited time, it would have been unrealistic to ask them to include parent consultation in the pilot. A few did, nevertheless, manage to consult parents briefly.

In their questionnaire responses just over half the P1 teachers thought that parents could be involved, but opinion was equally divided for and against whether parents *should* be involved. Those who wanted parental involvement felt it would provide better information for parents on a child's strengths and weaknesses, and raise parental awareness of the process of assessment. Others, however, were sceptical that most parents would want the detail on the present Record, and thought that they might even find it off-putting or, worse, might see it as a set of targets that their children should be aiming for; dangerous comparisons among children might be made.

All pre-school practitioners felt that parents should be kept informed of the assessment process, but they were divided as to whether parents should help with assessment, half saying that they should and just under half disagreeing. Most thought parents should be given a copy of the completed form.

Special Interest Groups

Staff in the two Special Educational Needs schools that participated in the Primary Baseline Assessment welcomed this opportunity to be included in a mainstream initiative. Together with consultations from other practitioners, they provided

constructive refinements to the Record. The schools had used the process throughout their primary departments as they felt this gave them an opportunity to assess each child's progress and to comment on the appropriate changes necessary for future planning. Staff commented on the benefits of the involvement "being part of a national pilot", which also provided a focus for staff room discussion and an exchange of evaluations and observations.

With the wide ranging spectrum of Special Educational Needs pupils, the individual nature of their development is a crucial aspect of their education, and the specialists would want to retain the most important record of assessment, the pupils' Individualised Educational Programme. However, the Child Record, with amended staff notes and an annexe for those pupils unable to attain any of the Features in any Aspect of Learning, would also be implemented. This would be used for P1 pupils and for an older child on admission to the school. The specialists felt that individual schools would want to make their own decisions on its use in other classes.

However, concerns were raised by some participants about the ability of their pupils to sustain progress in Features that had been taught – there was often little evidence of mastering and retaining knowledge. Also noted was the observed lack of interest and involvement on the part of some parents, which would make parental partnership difficult. Overall, the study suggested that the Record could be tailored to meet the requirements of Special Educational Needs pupils, and that the assessment would be welcomed by these practitioners. However, staff development and, more crucially perhaps, parental awareness and positive involvement are essential.

With regard to the assessment of children with English as an additional language, it was felt that undertaking an assessment solely in the English language would result in a distortion of the profile of a child's educational achievements. Clearly, special arrangements would need to be made to obtain as fair and valid an assessment as possible. One of the teachers, from a primary school with an appreciable ethnic minority intake, expressed considerable reservations about the general approach to the scheme, feeling that the Features did not give credit for the small steps that ethnic minority children often take at the start of primary school. Given this view, a process of wider consultation was undertaken. Those consulted felt that the assessment should also be undertaken in the child's preferred language whatever that choice might be. Versions of the Record should be available in a wide range of languages. If the teacher who was responsible for making the assessment was not fluent in the child's preferred language then the help of parents should be sought.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRACTITIONER EVALUATION

The great majority of P1 teachers and a high proportion of pre-school staff liked the general approach of the programme, largely because it was seen to be based on on-going classroom activities, relied on their professional judgement and covered all areas of the curriculum. It was also seen to be a potentially useful tool for reporting to parents and for liaison between pre-school, P1 and P2. A few practitioners mentioned its value for their own professional development.

Some basic confusions and ambiguities emerged during the evaluation, which would have to be addressed during staff development in a further pilot of the programme, and clarified in an introduction to the teachers' notes. Obvious examples are: the fundamental purposes of Baseline Assessment; clarification of the 'not known' and 'not taught' issue; the misperception of Features as 'targets'; and the uncertainty about whether Attainment Statements implied a 'best fit' or a quantitative assessment.

The most serious general reservations were in terms of teacher variability and the workload involved. In this regard, staff development was seen by almost all P1 teachers and pre-school practitioners to be of vital importance to the development of the Baseline Assessment programme. It was felt that staff training and guidance,

as well as detailed staff notes and exemplification, were necessary if consistency of interpretation and reliability were to be established. As well as initial input, the practitioners would like opportunities to consult with colleagues in other schools and pre-school centres, and to attend practical workshops with exemplars to practise assessment skills. They also want trained support from other staff to be readily available. All felt this level of support important to ensure the minimum of teacher/staff variability within pre-school establishments, between pre-school establishments and between pre-school and primary school.

THE WAY AHEAD

The recent Consultation Document on assessment endorses the approach taken to the assessment of young children's educational achievements adopted in this scheme by concluding that any future national system will need to continue to be based on the professional judgement of teachers (SEED, 1999). It proposes that a moderation element be introduced into the scheme to enhance reliability and consistency. In a recent review paper on research and assessment Black (2000) further supports the role of formative assessment in the formulation of policy at national level.

The Consultation Document recognises the need to address the 'value-added' dimension of assessment as well as the pedagogic dimension:

If assessment information is to be used to help primary schools to estimate their own added value and improve standards, it is useful to have an early starting point for data collection so that the early contribution of the early stages can be included in evaluations.(SEED, 1999, pp.52-53)

The Document then raises the possibility of having a dual system of assessment at national level to address the two functions – pedagogic and managerial – by different means. Responses to the consultation process have now been analysed (Hayward *et al.*, 2000) and it is clear that the majority view emerging in Scotland is that the value-added purpose should not dominate the pedagogic purpose. The response of government concerning the way forward is now awaited.

In the meantime, on the basis of the findings from the baseline pilot study and in particular the participants' evaluation, a number of changes have been made to the original assessment scheme, which is now being used in its modified form in many Scottish local authorities:

the title has been changed from 'Baseline Assessment' to 'Transition Record', in acknowledgement of the increasing variation in the age at which children start organised education. Most children now have experience of an early years setting at the age of 4 and an increasing number at 3. The notion of a common 'baseline' is therefore problematic.

the wording of the Attainment Statements has been modified to enhance clarity and consistency in interpretation.

In addition, extensive staff development materials to support the use of the Transition Record are being developed, it being recognised in the recent Consultation Document that such materials are essential for future use of the scheme, echoing the strongly expressed views of the evaluation team.

NOTE

- 1 The authors wish to acknowledge the input of the four development officers: Johanna Brady, Liz Cullen, Frances Davidson and Di Fox.

REFERENCES

- Black, P. (2000) Research and the Development of Educational Assessment, *Oxford Review of Education*, 26, 407-419.
- Blenkin, G.M. and Kelly, A.V. (eds) (1992) *Assessment in Early Childhood Education*, London: Paul Chapman.
- Hayward, L., Kane, J. and Cogan, N. (2000) *Improving Assessment in Scotland*, Glasgow: University of Glasgow.
- Scottish Executive Education Department (1999) *Review of Assessment in the Pre-school and 5-14*, Edinburgh: HMI.
- Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (1993) *Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland: National Guidelines. The Structure and Balance of the Curriculum 5-14*, Edinburgh: HMSO.
- Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (1996) *Improving Achievement in Scottish Schools. The Government's Response to the Report of the Task Force on Underachievement in Scottish Schools*. Edinburgh: SOEID.
- Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (1997) HM Inspectors of Schools, *A Curriculum Framework for Children in their Pre-school Year*. Edinburgh: SOEID.
- Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (1998a) *The Early Intervention Programme : Raising Standards in Literacy and Numeracy*. Edinburgh: SOEID.
- Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (1998b) *Scottish Education Statistics Annual Review 3*, Edinburgh: SOEID.
- The Scottish Office (1999) *Targeting Excellence – Modernising Scotland's Schools*, Edinburgh: The Scottish Office.
- Watt, J. (1990) *Early Education – The Current Debate*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.
- Wilkinson, J.E. and Napuk, A., (1997) *Baseline Assessment – A Literature Review*, Glasgow: University of Glasgow.
- Wilkinson, J.E., Watt, J., Napuk, A. and Normand, B. (1998) Baseline Assessment Literature Review and Pre-School Record Keeping in Scotland, *Interchange*, 55, 1-16.
- Wilkinson, J.E., Watt, J., Napuk, A., Normand, B. and Johnson, S. (1999) *The Development of Baseline Assessment in Scotland : Pilot Procedures*, Edinburgh: SEED.
- Wilkinson, J.E., Johnson, S., Watt, J., Napuk, A. and Normand, B. (2001) Baseline Assessment in Scotland: an analysis of pilot data, *Assessment in Education*, 8 (2), 171-192.
- Wolfendale, S. (1993) *Baseline Assessment : A Review of Current Practice, Issues and Strategies for Effective Implementation*, Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books Ltd.
- Worthington, T. (1998) *Baseline Assessment*. Letter of 16.04.98 to Dr. A. Lennon, Chairman, Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, Belfast.

ANNEXE

THE EIGHT ASPECTS OF LEARNING AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVE FEATURES

Brackets indicate Features which were included in the scheme at the pre-school stage but not at P1. All other Features were included in the scheme at both stages. However, in the pre-school scheme some Features were located below a dotted line, to indicate their marginal relevance to education at this stage: pre-school staff were nevertheless invited to rate pupils' demonstration of these Features by indicating those cases where the skill, ability or behaviour concerned was 'readily observable' (for above-the-line Features at the pre-school stage and for all Features at P1 the additional rating of 'observable only in some contexts' was also invited). Features are presented in the order in which they appeared in the scheme at the pre-school stage (there were slight variations here and there in the P1 version).

PERSONAL, EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

- Separates readily from parent/carer
- Plays independently
(Plays cooperatively and shares resource)
- Expresses appropriately own feelings, needs and preferences
- Recognises others' feelings, needs and preferences

Is developing relationships with adults and other children
Is confident in a range of relationships
Shows interest & curiosity
Knows when to seek help
Remembers and observes rules
Demonstrates appropriate levels of concentration
Exercises self-control
Commits to a task and completes it
Responds appropriately to instructions
.....
Cooperates with others in pair/group/class situations
Is independent in personal hygiene, cloakroom and other routines
Takes turns & shares

PHYSICAL CO-ORDINATION

(Participates in energetic activity both indoors and out)
(Can use the body safely in physical activity in a range of different ways)
Controls and coordinates own body in physical activity
Controls/manipulates small tools and equipment effectively
Uses large play and games equipment confidently
Links series of physical activities successfully
.....
Shows awareness of own body, space and safety
Knows the importance of health and fitness

EXPRESSIVE COMMUNICATION

Observes & represents colour, line, shape and form with reasonable accuracy
Expresses own ideas through 2 dimensional and 3 dimensional forms
(Makes music by singing, clapping and playing percussion instruments)
Listens to and reproduces beat and rhythm
Uses voice and instruments to invent music to express thoughts and feelings
Participates in role play, improvisation, mime and expressive movement
Expresses own ideas and feelings in role play, improvisation, mime and expressive movement
Listens to and reproduces pitch, as well as beat and rhythm
Selects appropriate medium/media to express ideas and feelings

LISTENING AND TALKING

(Listens to other children and adults during social activity and play)
Responds by asking/answering questions in pair/group situations
Sings/recites rhymes, poems, jingles, etc
Talks fluently about experiences/story
Listens attentively to follow thread of story/discussion