



Analysis of feedback on the Welsh Government public consultation process on draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

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Welsh Government

Authors:

York Consulting: Philip Wilson, Hannah Russell and Martha Julings

University of Wales Trinity Saint David: Natalie MacDonald, Dr Jane Waters-Davies, Dr Glenda Tinney, Dr Jessica Pitman, Natasha Young and Paul Darby

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Overview

This document summarises the responses to the consultation on draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

Action Required

This document is for information only.

Further information and related documents

Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.

Contact details

For further information:

Author details

Email: philip.wilson@yorkconsulting.co.uk

Additional copies

This summary of response and copies of all the consultation documentation are published in electronic form only and can be accessed on the Welsh Government's website.

Link to the consultation documentation: <https://www.gov.wales/draft-assessment-arrangements-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings>

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1 INTRODUCTION

This research was commissioned by the Welsh Government to undertake the analysis of feedback and consultation responses on [draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#).

This report includes the findings from the online consultation and from a series of workshops with sector stakeholders. The research was undertaken between October 2022 and February 2023.

Context

Early learning for 3- and 4-year-olds is delivered in schools and also some childcare settings which are funded by the local authority to deliver education (funded non-maintained nursery settings). These settings can range from private day nurseries to cylchoedd meithrin and playgroups providing sessional care. Some 10,000 children receive their early learning in around 530 childcare settings across 20 of the 22 local authorities in Wales¹.

Curriculum for Wales was implemented from September 2022. [Curriculum for Wales guidance](#) aims to help each school develop its own curriculum, enabling their learners to develop towards the four purposes of the curriculum – the starting point and aspiration for every child and young person in Wales.

Acknowledging that funded non-maintained nursery settings were unlikely to have the capacity, expertise or resources to develop their own curriculum the Welsh Government published a [curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#) in January 2022 for settings to adopt, should they wish to do so. The curriculum was developed through a process of co-construction by practitioners, drawing on expertise from across the non-maintained sector, and with experts in child development and early education.

From September 2022, all funded non-maintained nursery settings had a legal duty to implement appropriate assessment arrangements to support learner progression and the Welsh Government has committed to co-constructing relevant arrangements to support practitioners to fulfil this duty. The purpose of the arrangements was to ensure children in settings were supported to make progress in ways which are appropriate to their needs and to ensure practitioners are implementing assessment practices which align with the principles of Curriculum for Wales framework.

The arrangements were published in draft format on 30 September 2022 and were subject to a 12-week public consultation. The final arrangements will be published by September 2023.

The objective of this research was to provide the Welsh Government with rich and detailed feedback to inform the refinement of the arrangements following the consultation period.

Report structure

This report outlines the online consultation findings, summarises the workshop findings and contrasts the findings from both elements of research.

¹ Welsh Government invitation to tender, July 2022

2 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

This document summarises the responses to the 14 consultation questions. Whilst it cannot capture every comment, it tries to convey the key messages.

Several matters were raised that did not have a direct bearing on the subject of the consultation. We have noted these matters but not considered them in any detail within this summary.

The content of responses varied greatly, though most respondents addressed the majority of the key policy questions asked in the consultation.

Some respondents gave very detailed replies, for which we are grateful. Whilst it is not possible to reflect fully all matters raised, the key themes raised in response to each question are summarised.

About the respondents

The Welsh Government received 61 responses to the consultation. Individuals could submit their responses by online questionnaire, email or post.

A total of 61 respondents completed the online consultation made available to the public through the Welsh Government website for a 12-week period from 30 September to 23rd December 2022.

The largest group of respondents was Early Years Advisory Teachers (EYATs) or equivalent (21). Throughout this document these respondents will be referred to solely as EYATs.

Amongst the others who responded were setting leaders or equivalent (14), school-based practitioners (9), and staff from Umbrella organisations (6). The 11 respondents in the 'other' category included students or academics, local authority (LA) representatives, inspectors and a registered body.

Table 2.1: Analysis of respondent type

Types of respondent	Number of respondents	% of respondents
EYAT	21	34%
Leader	14	23%
School	9	15%
Umbrella organisation	6	10%
Other (please specify)	11	18%
Total	61	100%

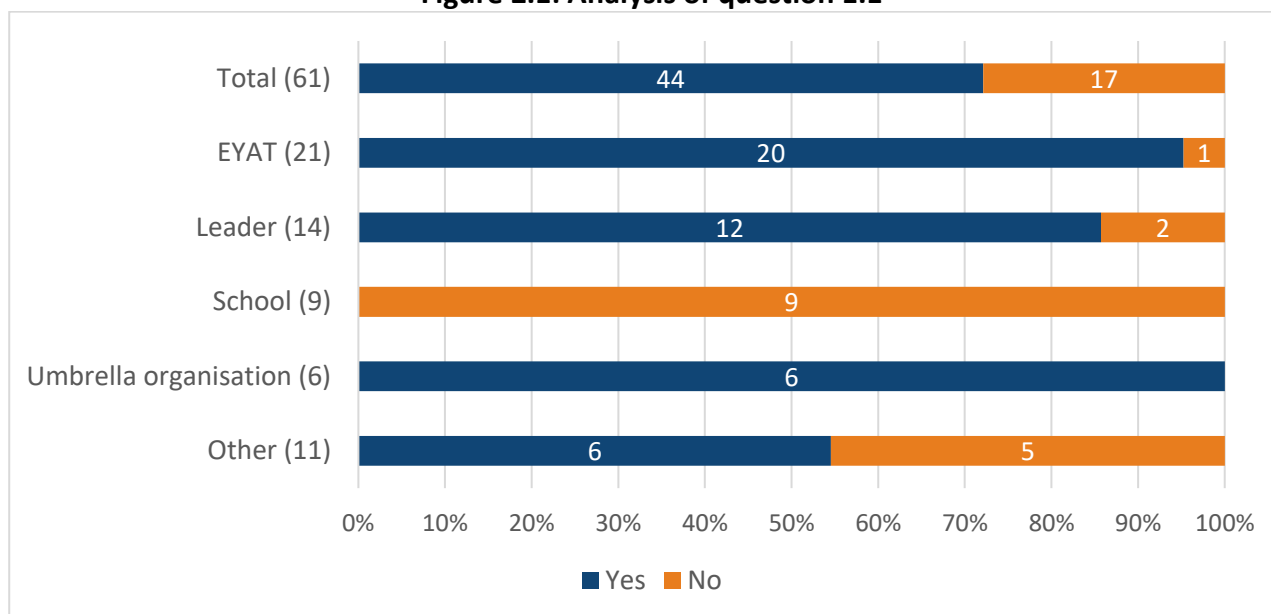
Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents

Question 1.1: Do you work in or support the delivery of education in a funded non-maintained nursery setting?

Most respondents (44) identified that they work in or support the delivery of education in a funded non-maintained nursery setting. The remaining few (17) were mostly school respondents.

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Figure 2.1: Analysis of question 1.1

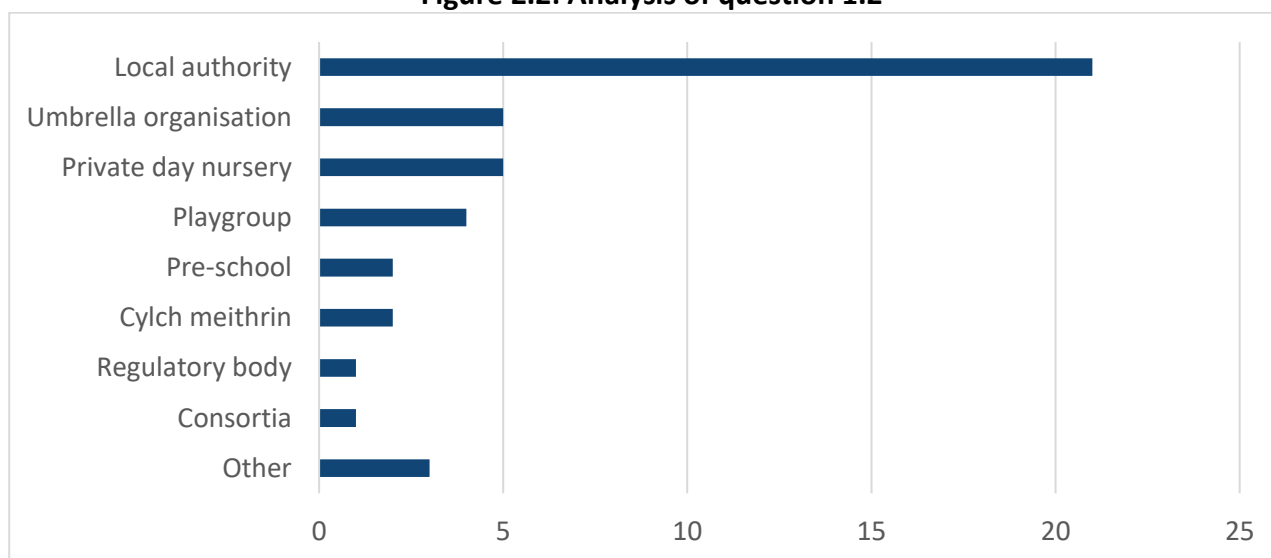


Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents.

Question 1.2: If yes, in which type of setting/organisation do you work?

Most respondents who work in or support the delivery of education in a funded non-maintained nursery setting work within a local authority (21), and of those working within a local authority, most were EYATs (19). Smaller numbers indicated that they work within umbrella organisations (5) and private day nursery settings (5). Respondents selecting the other category included a foundation learning leader, an individual from a university and a respondent from Flying Start.

Figure 2.2: Analysis of question 1.2



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=44 respondents

Question 1.3: What is your primary role?

Responses to question 1.3 identified that those answering 'no' to question 1.1 included development officers, a consultant, a senior lecturer and an individual working in policy development. Six out of the 9 school respondents identified themselves as a leader.

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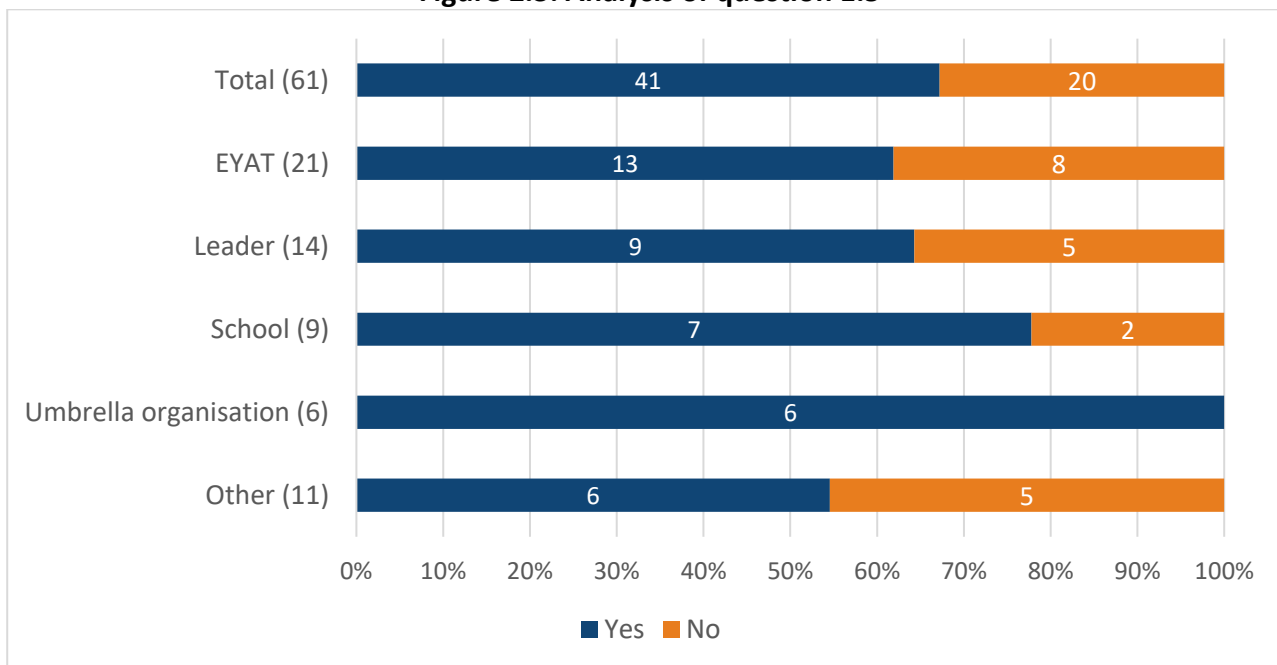
Question 1.4: If you do not work in or support the delivery of education in a funded non-maintained setting, in what capacity would you like to provide feedback?

The majority of respondents who do not work in or support delivery of education in a funded non-maintained setting left feedback in the capacity of 'other' (10) respondent. This included 7 school respondents. Two respondents provided feedback as 'student/academic' whilst another 5 respondents did not specify their role.

Question 1.5: Are you providing feedback on behalf of an organisation or group?

Just over two-thirds of respondents (41) selected 'yes', they were providing feedback on behalf of an organisation or group.

Figure 2.3: Analysis of question 1.5



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents

Question 2: Have you read the 'Draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings' consultation document?

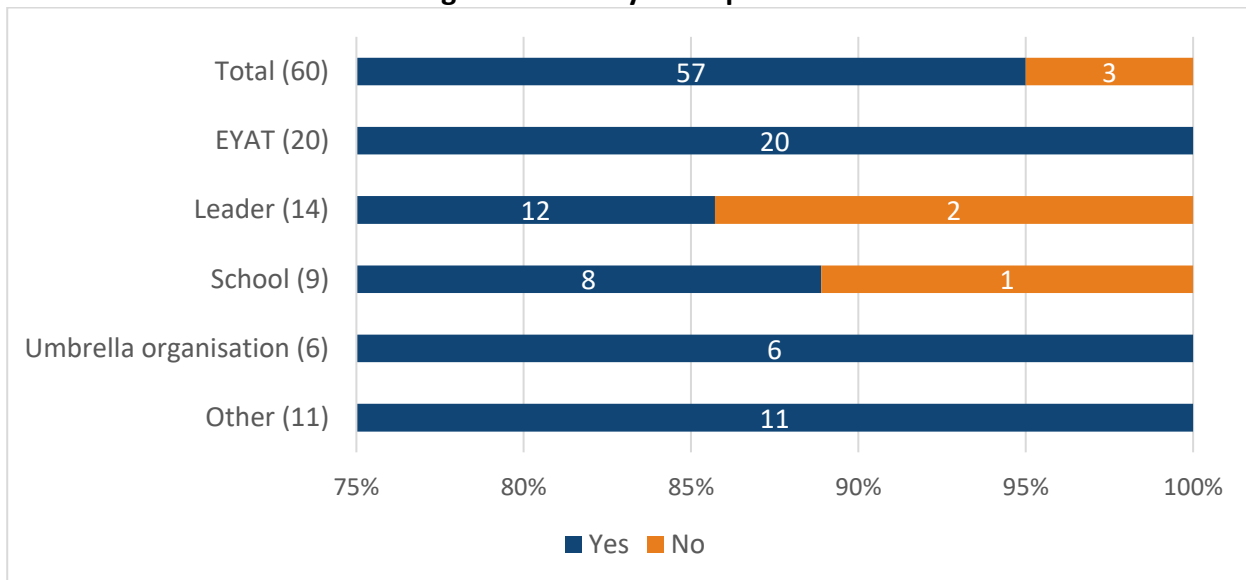
All 61 respondents to the online consultation said 'yes', they had read the draft assessment arrangements consultation document.

Planning and progression

Question 3.1: Are you aware of the legal duties for assessment arrangements in funded non-maintained nursery settings?

Nearly all respondents (57 out of 61) selected 'yes', they were aware of the legal duties for assessment arrangements.

Figure 2.4: Analysis of question 3.1

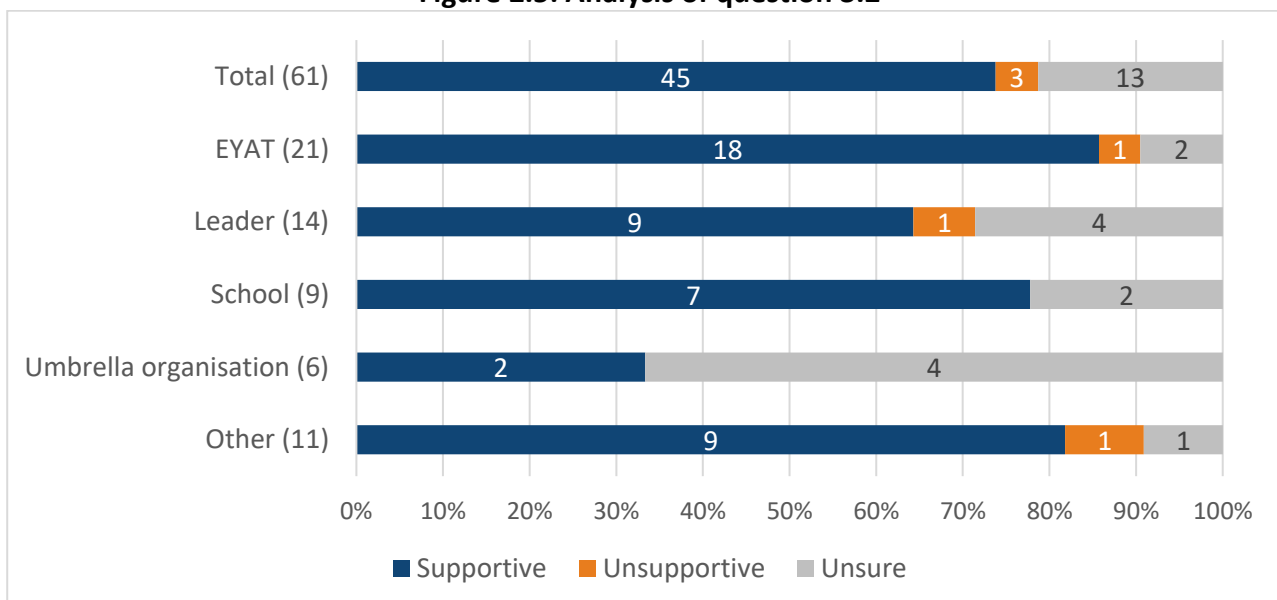


Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base= 60 respondents. Note: Base figure is lower than total consultation respondents as 1 respondent did not answer this question.

Question 3.2: To what extent will these assessment arrangements support practitioners in fulfilling their legal duties to undertake assessments of children's progress in funded non-maintained nursery settings?

Around three-quarters of respondents (45) selected that the assessment arrangements would be 'supportive' for practitioners in fulfilling legal duties.

Figure 2.5: Analysis of question 3.2



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents.

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A total of 45 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Agreement (31)

Most commonly, respondents shared views suggesting the assessment arrangements are clear and thus supportive to practitioners implementing them.

“The assessment arrangements are clearly set out in a way that supports practitioners to observe and report on children’s attainment. They give a clear structure and examples of what observations a practitioner should be making and how to record these in a meaningful way that meets the legal duties but also reports to parents and gives a foundation to provide for the children’s next steps.” EYAT

A few also stated that the assessment arrangements provide clear examples to support observation and assessment of the children for practitioners. Others suggested that the arrangements were more holistic than existing practice, therefore allowing for more individualised assessment and support for each child.

Further guidance or clarity (11)

A smaller proportion of respondents commented that they would have liked greater clarity in the arrangements. Some of these respondents called for an assessment tool or structure to assessments to be provided to support practitioners.

A few respondents would like the legal duties statement to be emphasised more in the document, potentially through bold text, to ensure all readers focus on this. A couple of respondents felt the phrase “you are not obliged to adopt these” could cause confusion, so suggested a reiteration of the legal duty to include a statement about settings designing their own assessment arrangements instead.

Training and support (10)

Respondents identified that further training and support may be needed. Some suggested this as they were of the view that all staff involved in the learning and teaching process would need a common and shared understanding, which they felt could not be achieved with the arrangements alone. A couple of respondents emphasised varying experience levels as a factor influencing practitioner understanding.

A few umbrella organisations also called for training and support to be extended to maintained and school settings to ensure a shared understanding of the prior assessments and progression of incoming learners.

“[We] believe that professional learning will be required for maintained settings and schools on the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings and the assessment arrangements to ensure that the information and records of progress shared during periods of transition for children from the non-maintained sector is respected, understood and valued in informing their next step along the learning continuum”. Umbrella organisation

Other comments (10)

Other comments raised included general disagreement with the proposed arrangements. Reasons given included dislike of the focus on assessment for children at such a young age and lack of links

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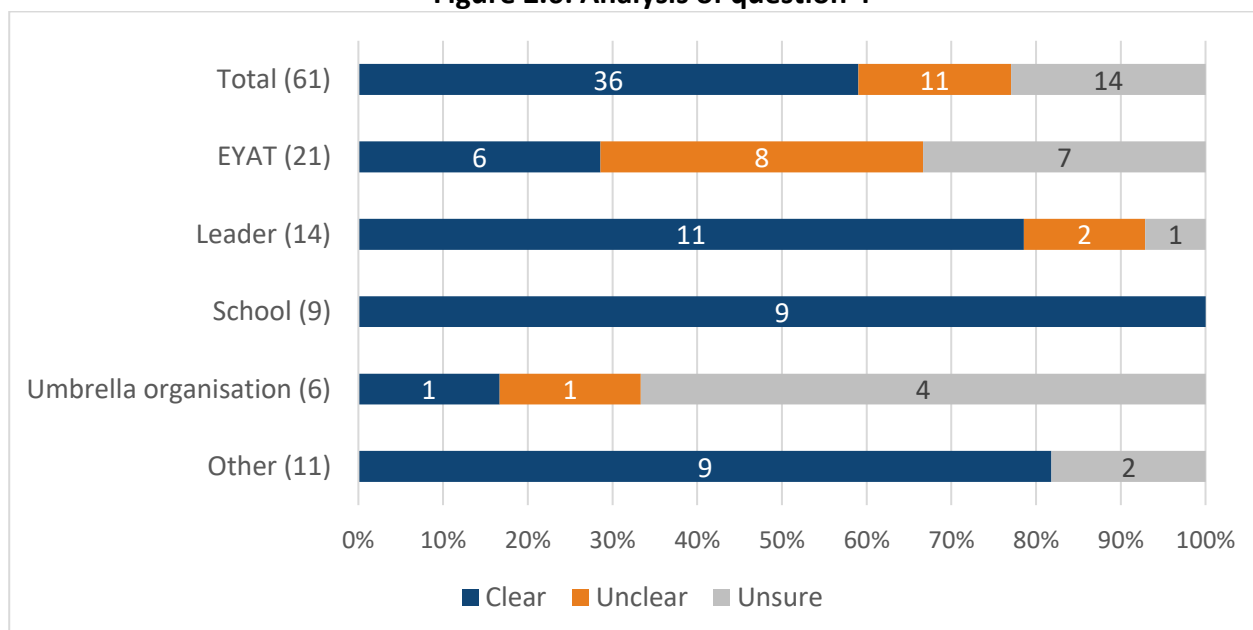
to progression pathways, National Minimum Standards and the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code.

A few comments related to a lack of recommendations for children under 3 years old. Respondents suggested this meant that these young children would not have specific assessment arrangements and learning and progression could be missed as a result.

Question 4: How clear is it that practitioners should use these arrangements to support their assessments when planning for progression?

Over half of respondents (36) selected that they thought it is 'clear' how practitioners should use the arrangements to support their assessments when planning for progression. All schools (9) and most leaders (11) and 'other' groups (9) selected 'clear'. EYAT respondents were more likely to select 'unclear' (8) or 'unsure' (7). Umbrella organisations were more likely to select 'unsure' (4).

Figure 2.6: Analysis of question 4



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents.

A total of 39 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Intended use is clear (17)

Respondents commonly supported the view that it is clear that the arrangements should be used to support assessments. Some respondents drew out key aspects of the arrangements including that:

- It is clear that initial assessments take place within 6 weeks.
- The arrangements provide clear definitions and examples of what assessments are.
- The document clearly sets out initial assessments and the need for follow-ups to plan for progression and next steps for each child.

A few respondents suggested the arrangements were clear due to the structure of the document, the inclusion of examples and the presentation of information in tables and bullet points.

Progression section unclear (12)

A number of EYAT respondents and one umbrella organisation commented that the progression section was not clear. These responses included the view that the arrangements are not user-friendly for nursery practitioners due to the language used.

“We feel that the section on progression is not written in a useable way for practitioners in contrast to the user friendly easy to read curriculum for non-maintained nursery settings. The section is full of jargon and very 'wordy', it is very formal and will not fulfil the purpose for the intended audience.” EYAT

In addition, respondents suggested that although the document says what should be happening to aid progression, it does not provide enough clarity for practitioners on how to support this.

“To aid progression however, much more guidance on what the incremental steps look like and support with knowledge of child development within each developmental pathway for practitioners is needed.” EYAT

Concerns were also raised by a few respondents that responsibility will lie with individuals in each setting to ensure all staff understand the arrangements. It was felt that this would increase the workload for these individuals and would greatly depend upon their level of understanding.

Sets progression clearly (8)

Conversely, respondents expressed views that the arrangements set out planning for progression very clearly. These respondents suggested that the arrangements set a shared understanding of progression for all stakeholders in four key areas. Respondents praised the use of examples and having progression as a focus in the front of the document.

“The guidance is clear and well written explaining the benefits of good assessments and observations. Each section provides examples of progression for a practitioner to see where a child’s next steps may be.” EYAT

Suggestions (11)

Most respondents offering suggestions to adapt the arrangements suggested the use of infographics to make clear the link between observation and planning for progression.

A couple of other respondents suggested changes to the language and structure of this section. One respondent suggested the sentence “Understanding how children make progress should inform assessment arrangements as part of our planning and practice” should be emphasised. Another respondent suggested the inclusion of the following:

“Supporting children to make progress is at the heart of the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings and these assessment arrangements are designed to be used as part of the curriculum when planning for progression”.

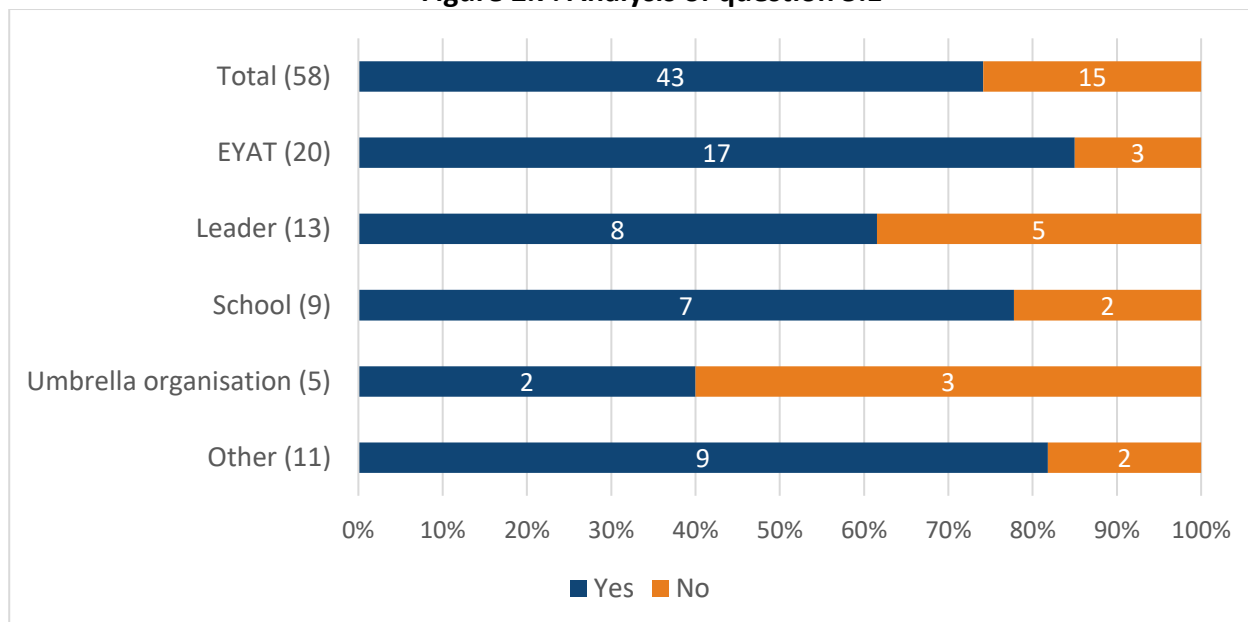
A small number of respondents also queried how the draft assessment arrangements could be developed for use with school-based primary provision.

There was also a view that the holistic nature of the assessments needs to be adopted by all stakeholders, including local authorities. It was felt that local authorities have previously focussed on comprehensive assessments for recording purposes.

Question 5.1: Is it clear how the principles of progression should be applied when making decisions about children’s learning and development?

Over two-thirds (43) of respondents selected 'yes', it is clear how the principles of progression should be applied. Just under a quarter of respondents (15) opted for 'no', including leaders (5), EYATs (3) and umbrella organisations (3).

Figure 2.7: Analysis of question 5.1



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=58 respondents. Note: Base figure is lower than total consultation respondents as 3 respondents did not answer this question.

A total of 41 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Application of principals clear (17)

Some respondents commented that this element of the arrangements is clear, specifically referring to how assessment links with the principles of progression. Generally, these respondents felt that the document provides a wealth of information which is clear for practitioners.

There were a few respondents who, whilst stating that the overall message was clear in the arrangements, suggested it was not presented in a user-friendly way.

Further guidance or clarity (13)

Respondents suggested that, as the principles of progression are from the Curriculum for Wales document, they do not correspond with the terminology used in the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings².

“[We] believe that due to the principles of progression being a new concept to many practitioners, there needs to be more explanation of what they are, and in language that practitioners can engage with easily.” Umbrella organisation

Some commented that although the arrangements provided a lot of information, it needed to be broken up and structured in the form of bullet points. It was suggested this would limit the risk of readers skipping large amounts of information to focus on the tables.

² [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](https://www.gov.wales/curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings)

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Other (8)

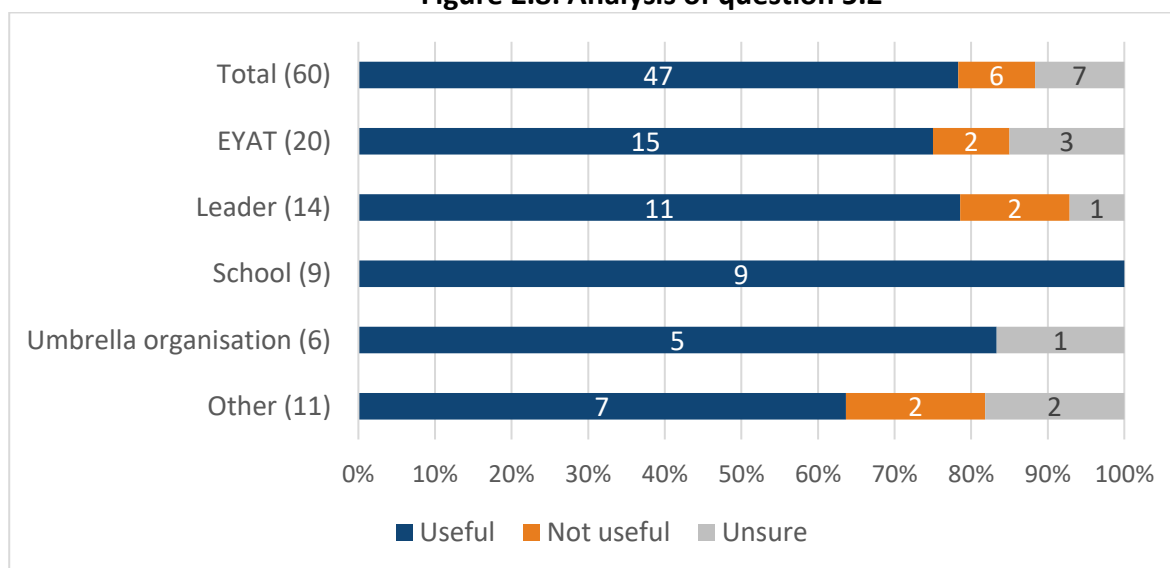
Other comments raised by a few respondents:

- Suggestion that there would be a need for professional learning and development to support with new terminology and practices outlined in the arrangements.
- Suggestion that the section including the principles of progression should be introduced earlier in the document.

Question 5.2: How useful is the table that shows how the principles of progression can be applied to support assessment of the learning and progress of younger children?

Over three-quarters of respondents (47) felt that the table showing how the principles of progression can be applied to support assessment was 'useful'. This was broadly consistent across the groups. Fewer than a quarter of respondents selected 'unsure' (7) or 'not useful' (6).

Figure 2.8: Analysis of question 5.2



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=60 respondent. Note: Base figure is lower than total consultation respondents as 1 respondent did not answer this question.

A total of 50 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Positive (41)

Respondents commented on the general layout and format of the tables, generally commenting that the layout is helpful, clear and concise and makes it easy for readers to access relevant information and examples.

“Principles of progression are broken down to what it looks like for age 3-4 year olds which makes it very clear to a practitioner.” Leader

A few respondents mentioned that the language used in the tables, alongside the structure using bullet points, made the tables more user friendly than other aspects of the arrangements.

Positive comments were made about the column 'what this looks like'. These respondents praised the use of examples specific to 3- to 4-year-olds. They stated these examples would support practitioners with assessment and observations of children of this age as they are provided with benchmarks. Some stated that the examples also created a clear link with the principles of progression, providing readers with a greater understanding of the principles.

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Language used (9)

A few respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the terminology used in the tables. They felt that the language and terminology used does not match that used in the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. In particular, respondents made reference to the use of 'Areas of Learning and Experience' in the arrangements. They stated that this is not in the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings so could cause confusion and not be implemented by practitioners due to a lack of understanding.

"It is useful, my issue is with how it's written. I don't like the wording as I don't feel it matches the new curriculum wording. The terminology that is used in the new curriculum is so much nicer and flows easily and they don't have the same feel." Leader

A couple of respondents thought that the left column was unclear and too wordy. They felt that it was not clear that reference was being made to the entire 3 to 16 curriculum. Some suggested that this, coupled with language used from the Curriculum for Wales document, may lead to confusion, especially for less experienced practitioners.

A small number of respondents also commented on inconsistencies in terminology used, with most boxes stating 'What this looks like' whilst the final box reads 'What this means.'

Unintended consequences (8)

Respondents expressed concern about potential unintended consequences of the table showing how the principles of progression can be applied, including:

- A risk that practitioners will use the tables as tick lists rather than as example suggestions.
- Suggestion that readers may focus on the table without looking at the explanation and rationale preceding it.

Dislike of left column (8)

A few respondents, mainly EYATs, suggested that the left column was unnecessary, confusing and unclear, and therefore should be removed.

Question 5.3: What, if anything, additional would you like to see included in the table?

A total of 43 respondents answered this question.

Change structure and format (10)

Some respondents suggested changes to the structure and format of the tables. Commonly these respondents called for the inclusion of annotated illustrations and pictures to clearly outline information.

Others suggested changes to the wording of the table heading to clearly state that the left column relates to the 3 to 16 age range and the right column includes examples, which should not be used as tick lists.

A few suggested the left column also needed rewording with more user-friendly practitioner focussed language.

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Further examples (8)

Suggestions were made by some respondents to include more examples of what the principles of progression look like in practice, including the use of case studies or links to videos.

“Whilst it may be impossible to have an exhaustive list of attributes to recognise in the ‘What this looks like’ column, there needs to be clarity such that practitioners, who are generally not qualified teachers, are comfortable in using them and can arrive at an objective assessment measurement that does not rely on that individual’s interpretation of the broad descriptors currently seen in the table.” Umbrella organisation

A few felt that examples should include those with ALN and specifically focus on basic daily skills.

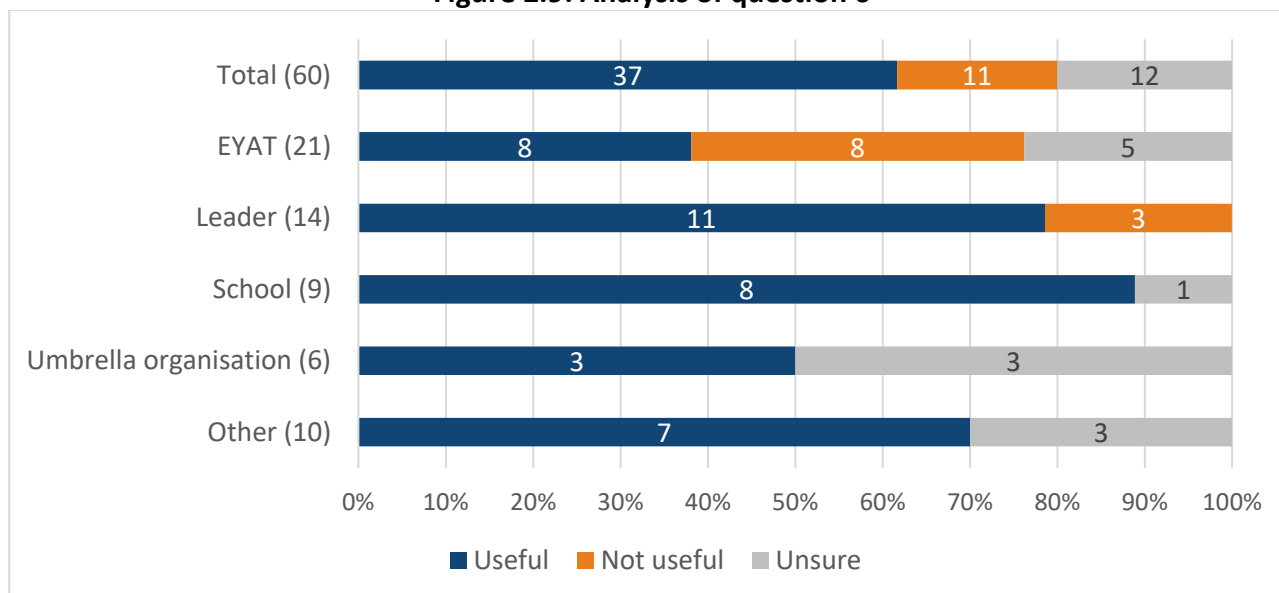
Nothing (7)

A small number of respondents shared that there is nothing they would like to add to the tables.

Question 6: How useful will the assessment arrangements be for practitioners to develop a shared understanding of progression (set out in section 4.3 of the consultation document)?

Over half (37) of respondents felt that the assessment arrangements will be 'useful' for practitioners to develop a shared understanding of progression. Leader (11) and school (8) respondents had a similar view. EYATs were more likely than other groups to select 'not useful' (8). Twelve respondents selected 'unsure' including 5 EYATs and 3 umbrella organisations.

Figure 2.9: Analysis of question 6



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=60 respondents. Note: Base figure is lower than total consultation respondents as 1 respondent did not answer this question.

A total of 45 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Useful (18)

Some respondents agreed that the arrangements are clear in setting out the expectations of professional dialogue that need to take place to develop a shared understanding of progression.

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“The document makes it clear that conversations need to happen between settings [and] stakeholders to ensure effective transition and consistent experiences.” School

A few respondents suggested the document would give practitioners, in all settings, a deeper understanding of what progress is expected before transitioning to primary school. Respondents also commented that the arrangements clearly explain that there should be liaison between schools, parents and other settings to ensure the needs of all children are being met to ensure progress.

Time and funding constraints (15)

Respondents discussed the time and financial implications associated with the proposed professional dialogue. Examples were provided where some settings would be required to spend more money on renting of building facilities and/or staffing to enable meetings to occur.

Comments shared by respondents highlighted that staff commonly work long shifts and many settings close at around 6pm, which is not an optimal time for meetings to be organised with schools and other stakeholders.

Respondents also suggested that meeting arrangements would be difficult to make during working hours. It was highlighted that managers are constrained by staff ratios and are facing recruitment and retention challenges, which reduces the ability to use cover staff during meetings. Others explained that staffing ratios and long shifts mean that staff meetings may only happen monthly, thus limiting the time spent on the suggested professional dialogue.

“The engagement at local, regional and national levels are inappropriate expectations for practitioners due to time, funding, other working commitments and workload from other statutory requirements e.g. implementation of the curriculum for non-maintained nursery settings and ALN reforms.” EYAT

Language used (8)

A few respondents commented that the language used would not be accessible for all setting staff. There were suggestions that senior and more experienced staff may be able to understand, however, respondents emphasised the importance of all staff being able to access and understand the arrangements.

One respondent felt that the use of the term “relevant stakeholders” is less accessible. A few suggested that stakeholders should be listed instead, as nearly all settings have the same stakeholders. They explained that this is one example where ambiguity and the potential for different interpretations could be reduced.

Further guidance (8)

Some respondents commented that they would require more guidance regarding the organisation of professional dialogue, including examples.

Some questioned whether it was the setting’s, school’s or local authority’s responsibility to facilitate and support meetings for this dialogue to occur.

A few respondents suggested further guidance was needed to outline exactly which professionals should be involved. Others raised queries about the logistical aspects of protecting time for all stakeholders to take part.

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“While the assessment arrangements set out an expectation for professional conversations it is not clear how this can be implemented in settings that are experiencing staffing and workload issues. If time is built in for such professional conversations then this will be helpful, however in themselves the assessment arrangements don't appear to set out how this can be ensured.” Other

Share with schools (7)

A few respondents emphasised that the document should be shared with schools as many were concerned that they may not be aware of draft arrangements. As a result, they may not be aware of their responsibility to invite settings to engage in professional dialogue. A couple of respondents also highlighted that this responsibility has only been outlined in a footnote and suggested that it should instead be emphasised in the main body of text.

Training and support (6)

Some respondents called for relevant training and development for setting staff. They indicated that professional dialogue between stakeholders may be a new concept to many settings, thus, they would require training on how to effectively navigate these relationships.

Other (4)

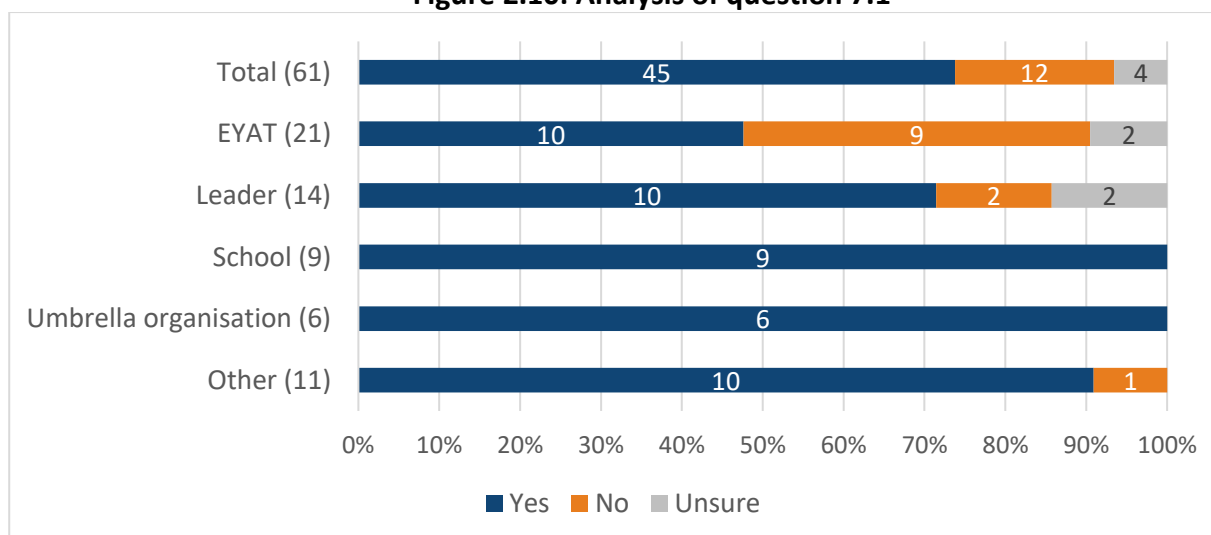
Other comments included the view that, as the arrangements may need to be amended, it may be useful to have a testing phase before the final arrangements are published. An umbrella organisation suggested that such a testing phase could take a similar approach to that used during the development of the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. Others commented that leaders need to trust practitioners' opinions during the suggested dialogue.

Initial and ongoing assessment

Question 7.1: Is it clear that both initial (section 7) and ongoing (section 5.1) assessment are equally important to children's progress?

Almost three-quarters (45) of respondents selected 'yes', it is clear that both initial and ongoing assessment are equally important to children's progress.

Figure 2.10: Analysis of question 7.1



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents.

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A total of 41 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Equal importance is clear (22)

Most commonly, respondents suggested that the arrangements are clear in identifying initial and ongoing assessments as key elements of a complete process of assessment. A number of respondents emphasised that they viewed the proposed assessments as an ongoing process requiring continuous review, rather than standalone assessment points.

“The importance of initial and ongoing assessment comes through strongly in the document, which reinforces to practitioners the role that these two play in the progression of children’s learning. It is crucial for practitioners to understand the process of assessment and the links between assessment and planning for future learning.” EYAT

More emphasis on initial assessment (12)

Some respondents thought that there is more emphasis on initial assessments in the document than ongoing assessment. Respondents believed that the higher volume of information relating to initial assessment has the effect of giving it greater importance within the document.

More emphasis needed (7)

A few respondents commented that although the point about equal importance is made in the document, they felt that it could be highlighted or emphasised more. A couple suggested that the sentence could be easily missed by readers otherwise.

Others suggested the use of examples to demonstrate how initial and ongoing assessments can be used together to build a better picture.

Other (14)

Other comments raised by respondents included:

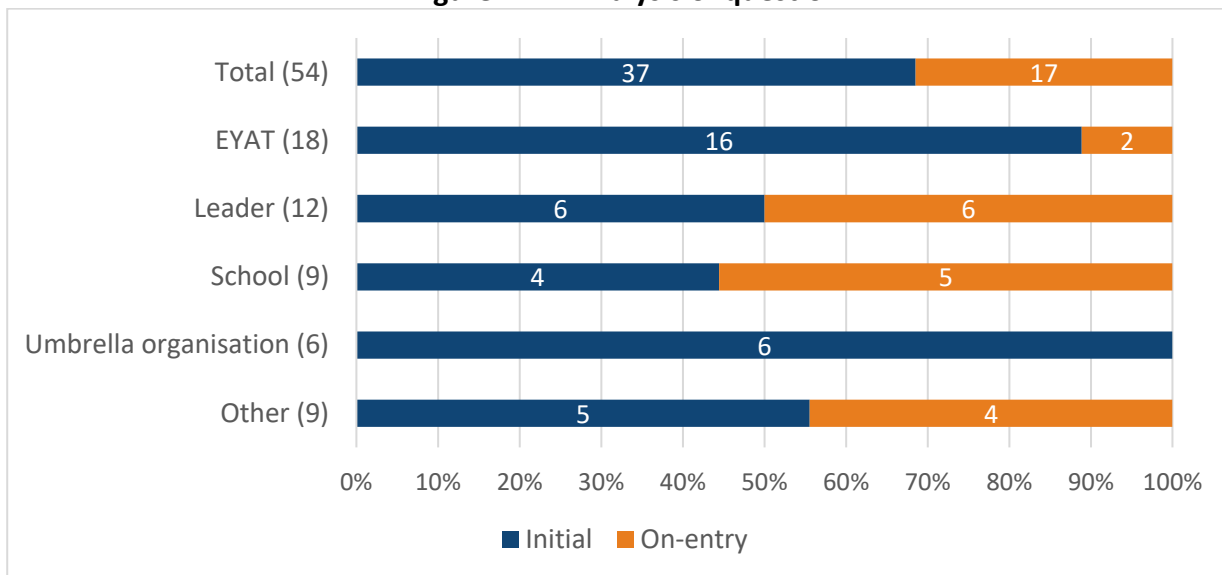
- The view that the proposed initial and ongoing assessments are similar to what is already implemented.
- Questions as to whether suggested timescales for ongoing assessment following initial assessment will be set out in the final version.
- Suggestion that repetition of information in the document generally makes the points less clear.
- Suggestions to adapt the layout so the role of observations and both assessment stages is set out first and then revisited later in the document, to enforce their importance.
- Concern that practitioners and leaders may think that they need to use up to 3 separate documents to effectively plan for children’s progress; the assessment arrangements, Curriculum for Wales and the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

Question 7.2: Which terminology do you find most useful for describing the assessments that must take place within 6 weeks of a child receiving funded nursery education?

Over half (37) of respondents selected 'initial' for the most useful terminology to describe assessments taking place within 6 weeks of a child receiving funded nursery education. All umbrella organisations (6) and three-quarters of EYATs (16) said 'initial'.

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Figure 2.11: Analysis of question 7.2



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base= 54 respondents. Note: Base figure is lower than total consultation respondents as 7 respondents did not answer this question.

A total of 43 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Initial

Themes that supported the use of the term ‘initial’ were as follows:

- **Provides a new narrative (19):** Respondents suggested that the term ‘initial’ reflects a change in practice, suggesting the new narrative of an ongoing process. Some suggested the term signifies the beginning of a process or journey, thus having following steps rather than being standalone.

“The term ‘initial’ is more in keeping with the ethos of the curriculum, it will lend itself to more settings and be more inclusive of all children. On-entry insinuates that assessment is a task and finish activity, rather than a continuum of learning.” Umbrella organisation

- **Starting age (10):** Others suggested that ‘initial’ is a better term as children may enter the nursery setting at a younger age, thus the term on-entry would not be appropriate. They suggested ‘initial’ is better suited to represent the start of their journey in funded education from the age of 3.
- **Negative connotations with on-entry (8):** A few EYATs supported the use of ‘initial’, suggesting that the term ‘on-entry’ could be associated with previous practices. Examples included scoring, skills ladders and data which are not associated with the new assessment arrangements.

On-entry

Comments that supported the use of the term ‘on-entry’ were as follows:

- **Clear and familiar (10):** Some respondents said they prefer the term ‘on-entry’, reasoning that it provides clarity on when the assessment needs to take place i.e., within 6 weeks of entry into funded education. Others suggested that because it is a familiar term it would reduce confusion for practitioners.

Analysis of feedback on Welsh Government public consultation process on draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

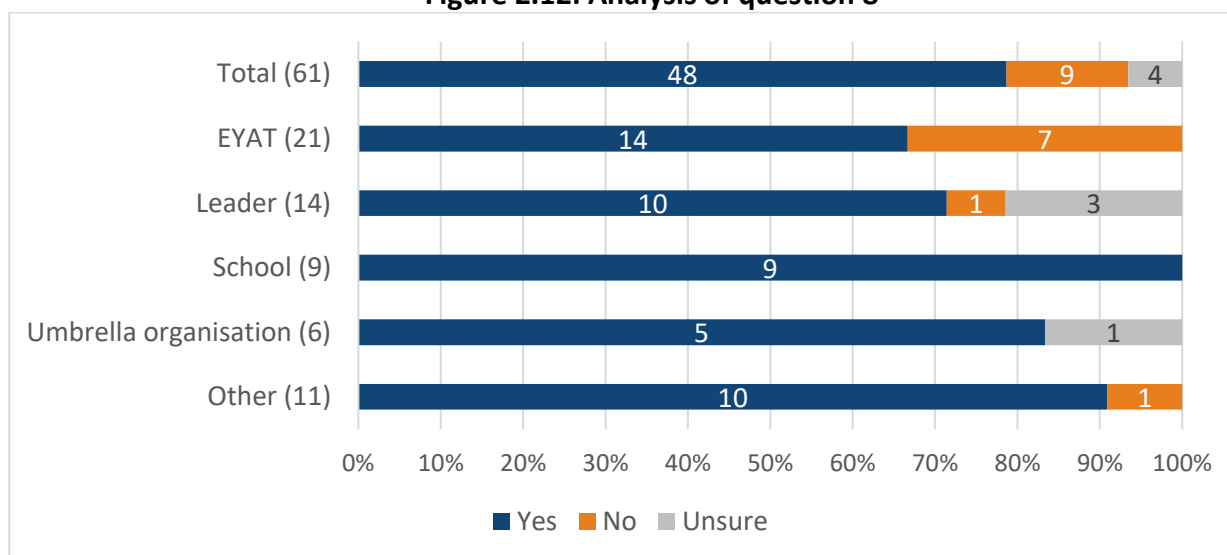
Other (6)

Other views were raised by one or two respondents. These included suggesting use of the term ‘initial baselines’ and the view that the terms ‘initial’ and ‘on-entry’ are synonyms, so the exact name does not matter. A few emphasised the importance of focussing on the timescale of 6 weeks instead.

Question 8: Is the purpose of the ongoing assessment (section 5.1) clearly explained?

Over three-quarters (48) of respondents selected 'yes', that the purpose of the ongoing assessment is clearly explained. All schools, most ‘other’ respondents and 5 out of 6 umbrella organisations said ‘yes’. EYATs and leaders were slightly less likely to say ‘yes’, with 7 EYATs saying ‘no’. Three leaders and one umbrella organisation selected ‘no’.

Figure 2.12: Analysis of question 8



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents

A total of 35 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Further guidance and training (17)

Respondents suggested that further guidance was needed in relation to ongoing assessments. Respondents indicated that they would like to have examples of ongoing assessment, including examples of what is not categorised as ongoing assessments, to provide a better understanding for readers. Respondents suggested that provision of examples would improve practitioner confidence in how to carry out these assessments continually. Alongside this, there were suggestions to include pictures or infographics to support a deeper understanding and help ensure the document is accessible for all practitioners.

Comments raised by a few respondents suggested that although the document had explained ongoing assessment, further training would be needed to supplement the information provided. These respondents stated that such training would provide clarity on how to carry out ongoing assessments.

Shows continuum and progression (9)

Respondents suggested the arrangements clearly demonstrated that ongoing assessments should be used to evidence progression continually without the need for designated assessment points.

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“It gives a very clear definition of what ongoing assessment is and is not (i.e., not a tick list) and that it should be tailored to each child, show their strengths and areas for development, and be used to measure the progress a child is making”.

EYAT

Generally clear (7)

Other respondents shared the general view that the arrangements were clear, without providing examples or reasoning.

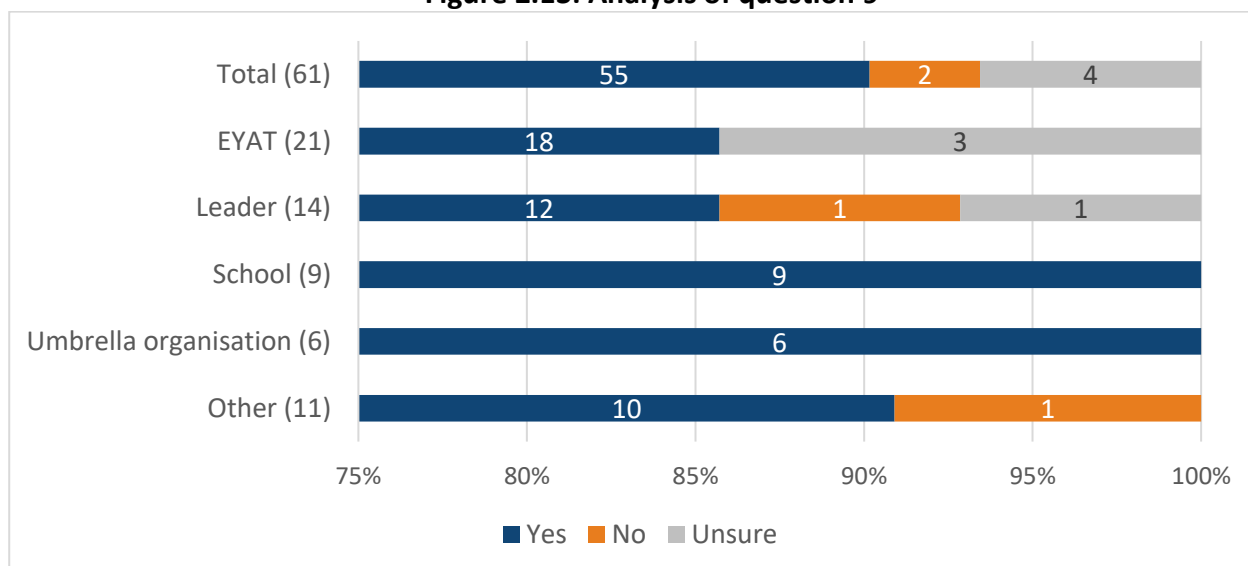
Other (4)

Other comments included views that this section is not emphasised enough. A few respondents made suggestions to include the section on ongoing assessments and observations earlier in the document.

Question 9: Is the role of observation in assessment clearly explained?

Most respondents (55) selected 'yes', the role of observation in assessment is clearly explained.

Figure 2.13: Analysis of question 9



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents

A total of 36 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Yes (27)

Most commonly, respondents identified that the arrangements were clear and provided practical examples for practitioners to use. A few of these respondents drew attention to the table explaining what observation should and should not be as a good way to provide a shared understanding across settings.

Others commented that the content is appropriate and presented in a clear way through using exemplars, which it was felt practitioners could relate to and put into practice.

Analysis of feedback on Welsh Government public consultation process on draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

Further guidance and training (6)

A few respondents suggested this section should be linked to teacher guided activity examples or further training offered to support practitioners to plan for these observations and integrate them into day-to-day practices.

A couple of respondents also thought that an infographic could be helpful to support this section.

Language used (5)

A few comments were made implying this section of the arrangements is jargon heavy and does not reflect the terminology used in the associated curriculum document. Respondents suggested that terminology needs to be consistent across all guidance and platforms to make the information accessible for all stakeholders.

Other (8)

Other comments included the view that observations are a more natural way of assessing children and one that practitioners are already familiar with.

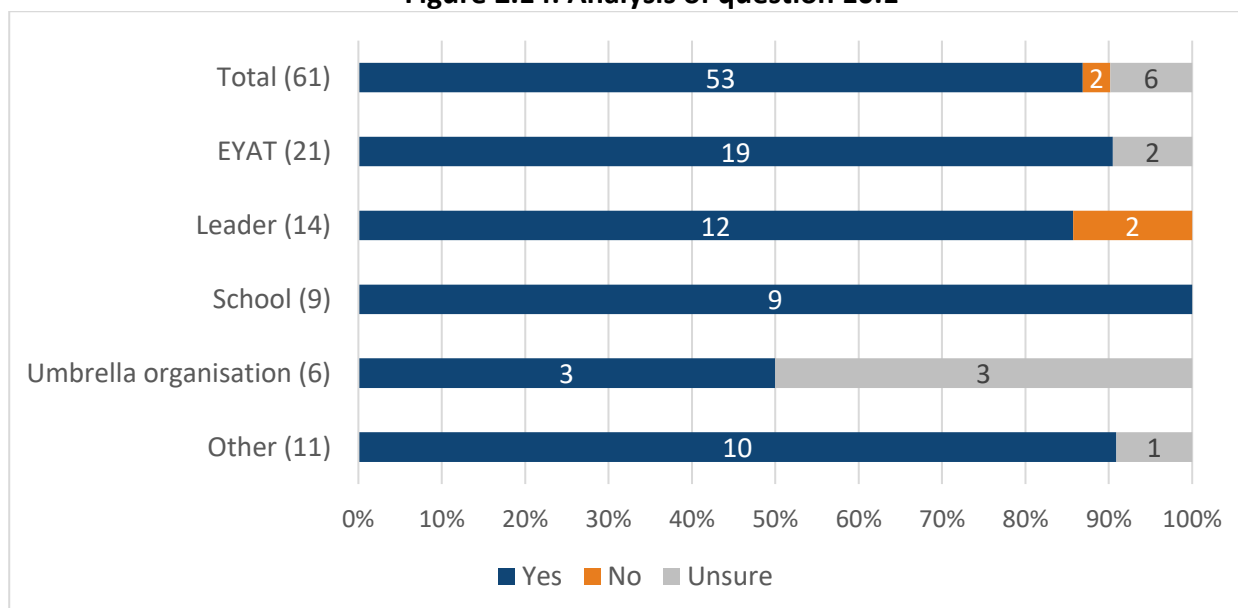
One umbrella organisation called for greater emphasis in the document that observations should not interfere with children's interactions and immersion in Welsh.

A couple of respondents also suggested that section 6 of the arrangements could be merged with section 5 for seamless transition, as it was felt that the separate sections made the information feel disjointed.

Question 10.1: Is the purpose of the initial assessment clearly explained?

Well over four-fifths (53) of respondents selected 'yes', the purpose of the initial assessment is clearly explained. All schools and most EYATs, leaders and other respondents selected 'yes'. Umbrella organisations were split, with 3 selecting 'yes' and 3 selecting 'unsure'.

Figure 2.14: Analysis of question 10.1



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents

A total of 35 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Analysis of feedback on Welsh Government public consultation process on draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

Clearly explained (20)

Commonly, respondents stated that the purpose of initial assessment was outlined clearly in the document. Specific comments made by these respondents regarding the initial and ongoing assessment tables are summarised under question 10.2.

Language used (7)

A few respondents commented on the language used in this section of the document. Generally, these respondents shared the view that the terminology used could be confusing for practitioners.

Suggested changes to terminology included:

- Changing 'should' to 'must', as 'should' implies there is a choice. For example, stating that practitioners 'must' use the information to plan teaching and learning.
- Including examples for summarising assessment information as it is currently too vague.
- Changing the headings to Social Development, Emotional Development, Communication, Physical and Cognitive (to include numeracy) to highlight the importance of child development skills.

Other (7)

A few respondents felt that it is unclear when an initial assessment should take place, as some children are in the setting before the age of 3.

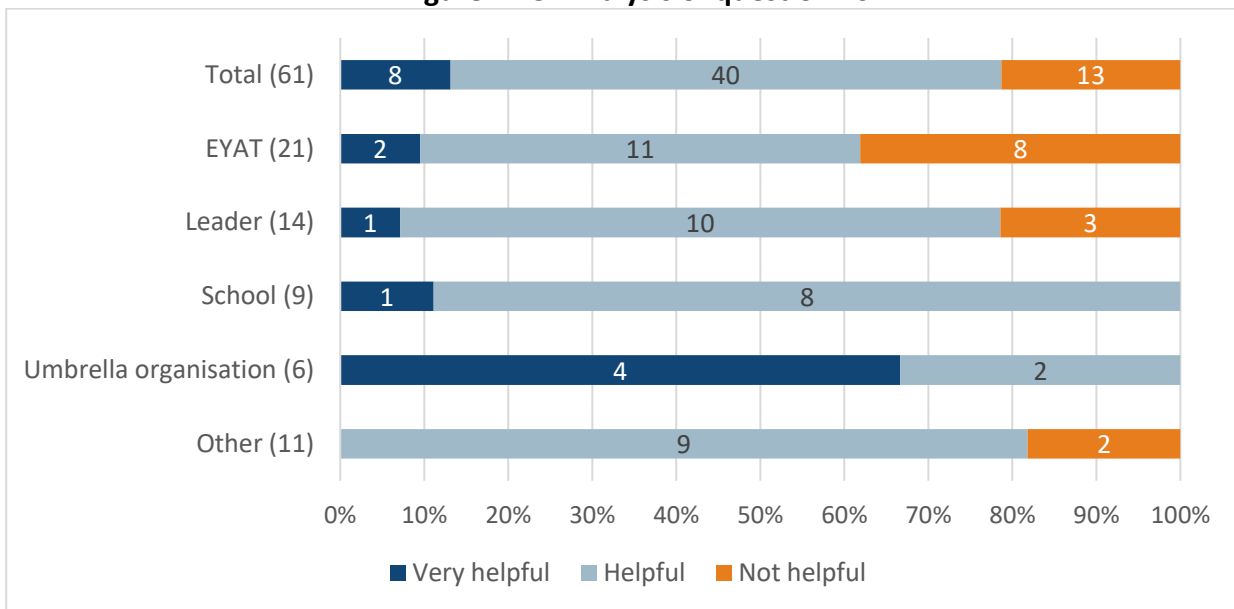
One umbrella organisation also called for further explanation as to the rationale behind the chosen assessment areas, as well as how they link with the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

Question 10.2: To what extent are the descriptions in the initial assessment section of the arrangements helpful in supporting practitioners to understand how children make progress?

Over three-quarters of respondents felt that the descriptions in the initial assessment were either 'helpful' (40) or 'very helpful' (8). EYATs were more likely to select 'not helpful' (8) than all other respondents.

Analysis of feedback on Welsh Government public consultation process on draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

Figure 2.15: Analysis of question 10.2



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents

A total of 37 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Clear (21)

Respondents commented that the descriptions were clear, providing adequate detail with clear examples. Many of these respondents commented that the information is accessible and written in a way that is understandable for practitioners, irrespective of experience level.

“We believe the descriptions are highly effective in supporting practitioners to understand the characteristics they may see as children make progress. They are particularly supportive to practitioners returning to the profession and those who are newly qualified.” EYAT

Unintended consequences (15)

Similar to responses received for the previous questions, respondents expressed concerns that practitioners may view the descriptors as a tick list.

“The descriptions are helpful, however, for want of ‘outcomes’ to work towards, some practitioners will use as a prescriptive tick list which is the opposite of the curriculum message.” EYAT

Others stated that there may be a risk of practitioners focussing too much on the descriptors. To combat this, there was a suggestion to include an infographic or bold text statement to draw readers’ attention to the purpose of the assessments.

Some respondents also suggested that the examples used may exclude some children and settings as it was felt they are too advanced for initial starting points. Relatedly, it was felt ALN pupils are not adequately represented as they may not reach the ‘initially’ stage.

Further guidance or clarity (7)

A few EYATs suggested that without further clarity or guidance, advisory teams would need to provide additional training and support to emphasise to practitioners that the tables are not intended as tick lists.

Analysis of feedback on Welsh Government public consultation process on draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

A couple of respondents recommended the inclusion of guidance to support practitioners into the next steps after initial assessments, to suggest how this information can be used to support progression and to aid learning and development.

Other respondents called for greater clarity around when the 6 weeks starts. They asked whether it would be from when a child turns 3, when funding is received or from their first day in the setting.

One respondent felt it should be made clearer in the arrangements that initial assessments should be an accumulation of information gathered over a 6-week period, rather than a snapshot.

Suggestions (4)

Suggestions made by a few respondents each included:

- Greater emphasis on the sentence 'descriptions are not exhaustive or intended to be used as a tick list'.
- The addition of a template or examples of initial assessment.

Question 10.3: What additional information, if any, would you like to see included as part of these descriptions?

A total of 36 respondents answered this question.

Additional support or examples (11)

Additional support required that was suggested by respondents included:

- Guidance to support practitioners if a child does not meet the 'initially' criteria.
- Guidance for settings working with children under the age of 3.
- For mathematical language to be included in the document relating to numeracy, as a few respondents felt that the language used is too vague.

Nothing more to add (8)

A few respondents stated their satisfaction with the descriptions provided and so did not see the need for any additional information.

Holistic approach (7)

Some suggested that their preference would be to remove the tables completely, due to the risk of these being viewed as skills ladders to be assessed against.

A few respondents suggested that as each skill has been broken down into lots of separate parts, this does not fit with the intended holistic approach. They suggested that inclusion of additional information would not have the desired effect of creating a holistic narrative because practitioners would then have too much information to manage.

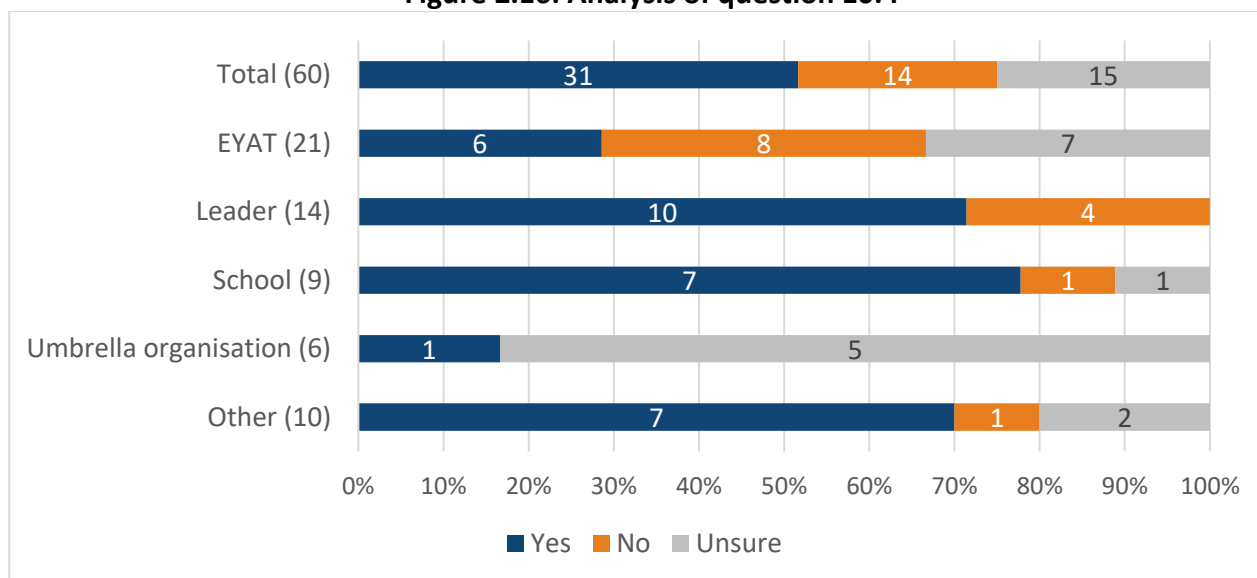
Clarity around tables (6)

A few respondents called for further clarity on how practitioners should effectively use the table examples.

Question 10.4: Does the layout of the descriptions support practitioners to make judgements about individual children’s progress?

Just over half (31) of respondents selected 'yes' the layout of descriptions support practitioners to make judgements. A higher proportion of leader (10), school (7) and other (7) respondents selected 'yes'. EYATs and umbrella organisation were less likely to select 'yes', with 8 EYATs selecting 'no' and 7 EYATs selecting 'unsure'. Five out of 6 umbrella organisations selected 'unsure'.

Figure 2.16: Analysis of question 10.4



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents

A total of 38 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Unintended consequence (17)

Most commonly, respondents suggested that the formatting of bullet points and a table run the risk of the descriptors being used as tick lists, skills ladders and an exhaustive list for practitioners to assess children against, rather than a group of examples.

“It may be perceived that information needs to be recorded under each description. It needs to be made clearer that a holistic approach to recording children’s progress is needed” Umbrella organisation

Other respondents suggested that, whilst the purpose of initial assessment is clearly outlined in the main body of the text, they felt the tables detract from this as readers may focus on the table of descriptors rather than the overall purpose.

Clear (10)

Other respondents suggested that the information provided was generally clear. It was felt that the examples clearly demonstrate progression from what it looks like initially through to what it looks like as it develops. Some suggested the examples provided in the table would especially support new practitioners and those new to the age range, as they have base examples to work from.

Analysis of feedback on Welsh Government public consultation process on draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

Inconsistencies (9)

A few respondents commented on the inconsistencies between the tables in the arrangements, with some having fewer columns than others. They called for greater consistency in the layout of the tables, with most calling for all tables to have three columns (Initially', 'As I develop' and 'As my development continues').

Suggestions (8)

A suggestion made by a few respondents was to present the assessment information against the 5 developmental pathways, to better connect with the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

A couple of respondents also suggested using a narrative approach rather than a list of examples, or including text prior to the examples, to identify that not all children may have reached the 'initially' stage and some may have progressed past this.

Other suggestions included simplifying rather than adding information and the potential use of digital methods of recording assessments that may be easier than handwritten comments.

Other (13)

The following comments were raised by a couple of respondents each:

- The view that instead of one assessment arrangements document, there should be 2 separate documents - a guidance document and a "working document".
- Concerns about the length of time that recording observations and assessments may take.
- A view that the language used is too complicated. An example provided included the 'consider' questions being too complex.
- Suggestion to match terminology with the developmental pathways.

Question 11: What else is needed to support the use of the assessment arrangements in practice?

A total of 47 respondents answered this question.

Training (38)

The majority of respondents answering this question advised that training would be a key element in the introduction of the assessment arrangements. There were multiple suggestions for this training to be centred around observation techniques, as well as respondents stressing the importance of professional dialogue. A couple of suggestions were also made that practitioners may require support and training to understand how the developmental pathways fit with assessment due to differences in terminology.

A few respondents suggested the introduction of a pro-forma to record information and associated training, to ensure a consistent approach nationally. Polarised views were shared regarding the delivery method for this training. Some suggested the introduction of a Hwb training module, whereas others felt in-person delivery would be more suitable.

There was greater agreement between respondents that the training should be a national-based model to ensure consistency across all regions and settings. A few respondents suggested that

Analysis of feedback on Welsh Government public consultation process on draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

there should also be consistent support for settings from relevant agencies, local authorities and EYATs during the roll out.

Infographics (10)

A number of respondents suggested including infographics in the arrangements. It was suggested that the document may not be practical for setting staff to use and that it may be difficult for practitioners to identify key information. It was suggested that the use of infographics would make the document more user friendly whilst also reducing its length.

“The current format is very text heavy, therefore infographics and images would help with the reading. It has also been mentioned that the document is written in a very formal manner on the whole with the tables being written in a more friendly and familiar tone.” Umbrella organisation

Further guidance (7)

Some respondents also suggested the introduction of additional resources to support with implementation. These suggestions included:

- Examples of initial assessments and what a child’s profile may look like.
- Good practice case study examples.
- A resource which links the developmental pathways, areas of learning and experience and progression step 1.

Other (11)

Other comments raised by one or two respondents each included:

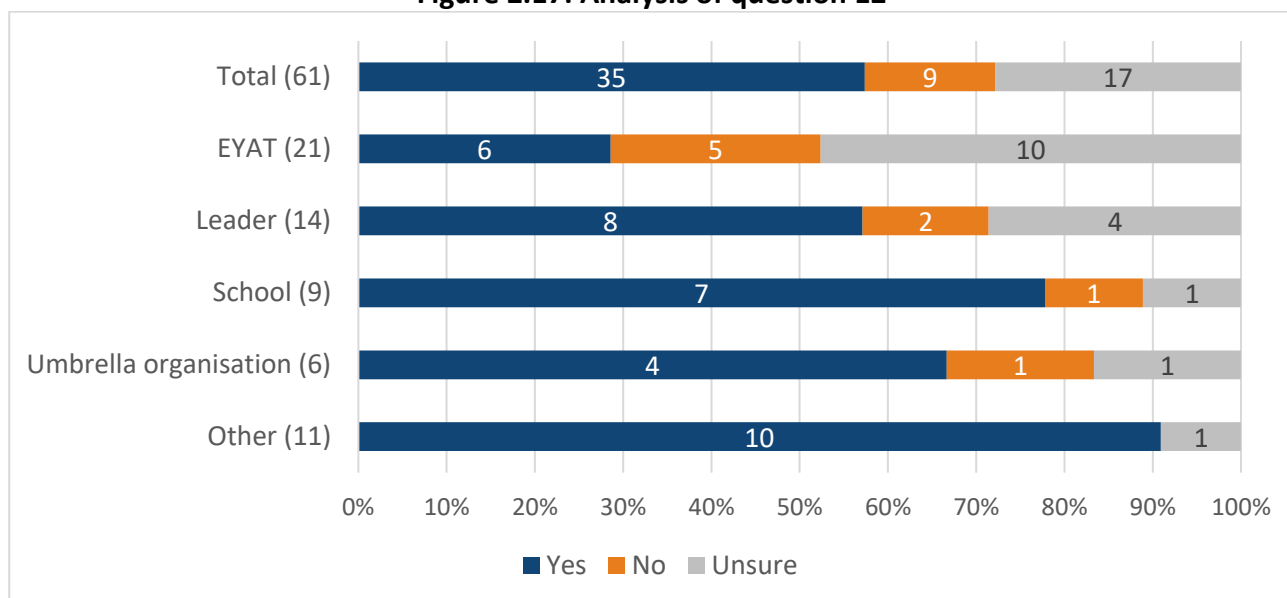
- The view that 6 weeks is not a long enough period for all children to be assessed.
- Calls for a shorter document, to reduce the time needed to read and understanding the arrangements so that practitioners have more time to work with the children.
- Requests for further guidance in relation to mixed age rooms supporting children under the age of 3 and how to communicate with parents when children may not be hitting the milestones.

Question 12: Can you see these assessment arrangements supporting children’s progress within and across the developmental pathways in the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings?

Over half (35) of respondents selected 'yes', they could see the assessment arrangements supporting children's progress within and across developmental pathways. Just under half selected 'no' (9) or 'unsure' (17). EYAT respondents were less likely to select 'yes' and more likely to select 'no' (5) or 'unsure' (10).

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Figure 2.17: Analysis of question 12



Source: Welsh Government consultation data, 2022. Base=61 respondents

A total of 42 respondents provided further comment to supplement their answer to this question.

Links well (14)

Respondents suggested the arrangements are clear and provide enough examples to support children’s progress across the developmental pathways.

“These arrangements should support children’s progress within and across the developmental pathways providing practitioners view them as part of teaching and learning and not as a bolt on to the curriculum. Generally, this is made clear throughout this document”. Other

More direct links required (12)

Respondents stated that there needed to be more direct links between the two documents. Some felt that settings may treat the two documents as separate, and thus assess against each one.

“We feel reference to the developmental pathways could be made more explicit in the document, particularly in relation to ongoing assessment and progression e.g. only one of the five principles of progression makes reference to the developmental pathways.” EYAT

A few respondents suggested there was a difference in tone and terminology used in the two documents, which could make it hard for practitioners to see the connections between them. They felt that reference to the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings and the same terminology should be woven throughout the arrangements instead.

Other (6)

Other respondents suggested more emphasis needed to be placed on using the assessment findings to support planning and that consistent strategies should be developed to support implementation across all settings.

Welsh language

Question 13: We would like to know your views on the effects these assessment arrangements would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English. What effects do you think there would be?

A total of 43 respondents answered this question.

No adverse effects (12)

Some respondents suggested there would be no adverse or negative effects on the Welsh language associated with these assessment arrangements.

More positive views (10)

There was some suggestion that the new arrangements would encourage more positive views towards the Welsh language and Welsh language settings for parents and carers. Some respondents said that as the new arrangements are not focussed on meeting certain criteria or skills ladders, children will not be “scoring” low when in a setting where Welsh is not their first language at home.

Language requirements are unclear (10)

Some respondents suggested that the arrangements do not provide clarity around what language children should be assessed in if the setting’s language is different to their home language. A few of these respondents made specific reference to initial assessment, as a child may have only been introduced to the language up to 6 weeks prior.

A few respondents saw the proposed arrangements as creating a risk for English language settings to only assess in English. It was suggested that the arrangements need to clearly state that English language settings would still need to assess Welsh language too. Respondents commented that confusion can sometimes arise in an English setting when practitioners are unaware of what the Welsh language requirements would be, if any, through assessments.

Not enough references to Welsh (8)

Some respondents expressed the view that there was not enough reference to the Welsh language in the document. Suggestions to improve this included having the Welsh language as a standalone learning pathway, introducing Welsh elements into the section for literacy and explicit mention of bilingualism and multilingualism.

Other (7)

Other comments included general uncertainty as to whether there would be any impacts on the Welsh language, with respondents stressing the importance of providing all documents in Welsh and suggestion the creation of resources to support practitioners themselves with learning Welsh language skills.

Question 13a: How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

A total of 24 respondents answered this question.

Clearer language requirements (7)

Respondents wanted to ensure that the language requirements of both English and Welsh settings were made clear. These respondents discussed the need for both settings to be considerate of the home language of the children, whilst also ensuring exposure to Welsh, thus safeguarding the importance of Welsh language for children, parents and practitioners.

Resources available in Welsh (6)

Respondents commented that documents, resources and training should be continually provided in Welsh to ensure they are consistently accessible to all practitioners and stakeholders.

Other (9)

Some suggestions were made for the creation of resources to support practitioners who are learning Welsh, whilst others stated that it would be beneficial for more Welsh language staff to be recruited into the sector. Other respondents were unsure how positive effects could be increased or negative effects mitigated.

Question 14: Please also explain how you believe these assessment arrangements could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

A total of 26 respondents answered this question.

Welsh language translation (8)

Some respondents felt that the Welsh language translation of the arrangements was less user friendly and accessible than the English version, due to the more formal language used. It was suggested that to mitigate this, the Welsh translation should be written by Welsh language practitioners.

“The formal language used in the Welsh version of the Assessment Arrangements is not user friendly and would be better written in everyday Welsh instead of formal Welsh.” EYAT

More reference to Welsh language needed (6)

Respondents felt that there was not enough clear and explicit reference to the Welsh language in the arrangements. They suggested that sections should be added purely relating to Welsh, whether that is the language skills children should be exposed to or how to integrate Welsh into observations and assessments overall. Others felt that Welsh should be integrated into the principles of progression and assessment in literacy more clearly.

“The danger with having the Welsh language not specifically mentioned is that the use of Welsh becomes tokenistic, a carpet time activity and not something fluid which progresses and develops over time.” Umbrella organisation

Clear language requirements (6)

Respondents reiterated previous comments regarding the need for clarity over what language children should be assessed in.

Welsh resources (5)

A few respondents recommended that resources should be provided bi-lingually and there should be development of resources to provide Welsh examples for English setting practitioners to use with children.

Respondents emphasised that training should be available in both English and Welsh, with clear opportunities for English setting staff to be exposed to and immersed in Welsh language learning.

Other (5)

A few respondents highlighted that the promotion of the Welsh language sits within the curriculum for Wales document and developmental pathways, rather than this document.

Question 15: We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

A total of 30 respondents answered this question.

Many comments reiterated points raised under previous questions, including comments regarding:

- Lack of consistency in the terminology and tone used in the arrangements and curriculum document for funded non-maintained nursery settings.
- The need for greater use of examples and infographics within the document.
- The Welsh language translation of the arrangements being more formal and less user-friendly than the English version.

In addition, a few respondents commented that most non-maintained settings will not have had a chance to trial the assessment arrangements at the time of the consultation period, as early education commences in January in many counties.

A small number of respondents also called for the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings and the assessment arrangements to be shared with the further education sector, to ensure newly qualified staff are aware and understand the requirements.

3 STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP FINDINGS

This section summarises the stakeholder workshops held face-to-face and online across Wales on the draft assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained settings.

Workshop participants

Workshops were offered to a range of stakeholders across the sector including practitioners and representatives from umbrella organisations, local authorities, regulatory bodies and other third sector organisations. Sixty-eight participants took part in the workshops, 33 of whom were practitioners. Workshops were offered face-to-face and online with the majority of participants opting for online sessions.

In-person workshops were offered in North Wales (Wrexham), Mid-Wales (Newtown and Machynlleth), West Wales (Monkton and Carmarthen) and South Wales (Cardiff). Online workshops were offered through October and November during the day (10am, 12.30pm) and evening (5pm and 7pm). Attendance at the online workshops was higher than attendance at the in-person workshops.

Table 3.1: Workshop attendance by workshop type

	Attendees	Percentage
In-person day	3	4%
In-person twilight	4	6%
Online day	40	59%
Online twilight	21	31%
Total	68	100%

Source: UWTSO workshop data.

Participants at the workshops offered a good representation of key stakeholders across the sector. Of the 104 who signed up to the workshops, 68 participants actually attended and took part in the discussions. This is equivalent to a response rate of 66%. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000: 263) suggest that a typical response rate would be 40%, with the potential to rise with subsequent follow up. Those who had signed up to a workshop but did not attend were contacted by the lead researcher to offer attendance at another workshop at a later date.

Of the participants, 49% were practitioners (18-day nursery/cylch methrin/sessional care; 7 childminders; 8 schoolteachers). Other participants came from support or regulatory organisations, with the highest proportions from local authorities (28%) and umbrella organisations (15%) including the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), Mudiad Meithrin and Early Years Wales.

Workshop discussions were recorded, transcribed and then analysed following deductive analysis using a priori coding and open coding to identify any other themes arising.

Workshop findings

Findings were organised under five key themes: attitudes, professional learning, barriers and challenges, questions and concerns, and other emerging themes.

Attitudes

General perceptions from all stakeholders were that the draft assessment arrangements are positive, with a strong focus on children and pedagogy. They were seen as clearly written and viewing the child in a holistic way, rather than separating a child's development into boxes as was the perceived practice in the Foundation Phase. It was noted that it describes progress well.

Stakeholders seemed to embrace the idea of moving away from tick box exercises to connecting and observing children in the moment. This seems to have influenced practitioners in the setting, freeing them to interact and observe children in natural play.

Feedback from those in supporting roles such as advisory teachers is predominantly positive, and the child-centred approach and embedded focus on wellbeing was well received. Comments were made suggesting some providers see this as a positive rather than a burden – an interesting perspective here is that they state 'some' but not all.

Professional learning

Suggestions for further implementation and rollout of the final draft of the assessment arrangements identified key areas for professional learning such as observation, child development and planning, as well as a desire for ongoing peer learning and support across the sector.

Access to and availability of ongoing professional learning was identified as an issue. There was consensus in several workshops that sharing good practice was important.

There was an acknowledgement in many workshops that the current implementation is a 'journey' or 'work in progress' which is evolving. Therefore, as well as opportunities there may also be challenges when implementing this change, and thus a training package from all stakeholders to support settings to meet requirements was noted as a possible useful tool.

Barriers and challenges

Similar barriers and challenges were identified across all workshops. Predominantly, these were linked to general sector challenges such as time and funding, particularly time to engage with understanding the assessment arrangements documents and professional learning that sit around them.

Practitioner confidence to engage in a more autonomous pedagogy and the need to strengthen and develop skills in key areas such as observation and planning were identified as key challenges.

Inconsistency of messages from all organisations supporting the implementation and inspection of the assessment arrangements was a key barrier discussed during a number of workshops.

Questions and concerns

There was a consensus across several workshops that implementing the assessment arrangements effectively would require support and guidance which retained the holistic ethos of the curriculum, thus avoiding tick box or tick list approaches in practice. Therefore, questions and concerns raised were linked to how practitioners could be supported consistently, and how the practice of documenting learning and progression could be implemented effectively by practitioners.

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There was general agreement that local authority advisory support, inspectorate bodies and other stakeholders needed to provide support in line with the ethos of the curriculum, and in line with each other, allowing for assessment documentation which reflects the assessment arrangements.

The discussion also highlighted concerns regarding the early childhood and education sector in terms of the workforce and how it is supported and valued, as well as the constraints implementing changes when there is a lack of practitioners. There were also concerns discussed linked to the lack of consistency between different parts of the early childhood and education sector and the resulting impact on transitions between the maintained and non-maintained sectors.

Furthermore, there were some specific concerns relating to the assessment documents and tracking progression.

There were also concerns regarding the lack of clarity with the assessment arrangements in terms of Welsh medium assessment.

Other emerging themes

The emerging themes highlighted that current curriculum and assessment changes could provide the permission for practitioners to provide child-led, play-based learning. However, the need for sharing good practice and guidance across the sector was noted as significant in developing effective implementation of the curriculum and assessment arrangements.

There was some consideration of the challenges and requirements in terms of harmonising practice across the sector and the implications this may have when supporting transition between settings across different sectors.

The absence of the voice of practitioners within the development of the curriculum was also discussed. There was also consideration in one focus group of *Cynefin* and implications of this concept for practice and thus assessment arrangements.

Responses were mainly positive towards the assessment arrangements and the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings more generally. Minor adaptations to the assessment arrangements were suggested and mainly related to making the links to the Curriculum for Wales more visible within the document to support better working relationships and transitions between the non-maintained sector and schools.

Consistency of expectations from regulatory bodies and support organisations was called for.

4 COMBINED THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Through consideration of evidence from the online consultation and workshops, a combined thematic analysis was conducted to compare and contrast the findings. It is important to recognise the different methods used to collect the evidence for the online consultation and the workshops. For example, the consultation questions and answers were much more specific and focused on the question, whereas the workshop data contained wider-ranging evidence from conversation guided by the topic guide themes.

Attitudes towards assessment arrangements

Data from the online consultation indicates overall positive attitudes towards the draft arrangements. Over half of respondents (and in some cases over three-quarters) selected positive answers to a range of questions. Generally, around a quarter, or fewer, gave negative answers.

Consultation respondents often gave qualitative answers that included somewhat opposing views from their quantitative response. So, a respondent may have agreed with a consultation question and then given an explanation which contained both agreement and concerns.

Many respondents stated that the arrangements are clear in outlining their purpose for ongoing assessment where information gathering takes place continually, moving away from a focus on standalone assessment points. A theme seen throughout the consultation responses focussed on the layout of information provided in tables, with many suggesting these made information more accessible as practitioners would be able to draw out key information quickly.

The online consultation explored respondents' attitudes towards the potential effects on the Welsh language as a result of these arrangements. Responses were provided, similar to those in the workshops, that there was not enough, or explicit, reference to the Welsh language in the arrangements. Both research methods found that stakeholders suggested there would be confusion in relation to assessments when the setting's language is different to that of the child's home language. However, more views were received in relation to the Welsh language in the consultation than in the workshops surrounding:

- A lack of a Welsh focussed development pathways.
- Views that parents and carers may have more positive views towards Welsh as the new arrangements are not deficit focussed.

Views were expressed through both the online consultation and workshops that the focus on involving multiple stakeholders was a positive move. However, concerns were raised in both that the responsibility for setting professional networking lay with schools, which respondents felt was not emphasised enough. The workshops also highlighted potential reluctance in the private sector to network with settings in direct competition with each other.

Overall, consultation respondents and workshop participants highlighted that the move towards planning, observing and assessing in the moment was a positive change. However, they felt this change would require time, training and support for practitioners to embed into regular practice.

Workshop participants commented on changes which had already been made and current practices in response to the draft arrangements. These covered:

- The positive effect the arrangements have had on children, allowing them to play without disruption.

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- Practitioners being able to be more creative due to a move away from task-oriented assessments.
- Differences in interpretation of the documents across Wales and in different settings, including documents that have been produced for reporting of progress.
- Positive reception by parents and carers of new practices in assessment already implemented and inclusion of their experiences and observations at home.

Other responses exploring barriers, challenges and suggestions to improve the arrangements are summarised in the following sections.

Professional learning needs

A variety of professional learning needs were identified through the online consultation responses and workshops. Generally, there were calls for professional learning to increase understanding and confidence of practitioners across the sector. This was noted as important to ensure consistency nationally and to support new and less experienced practitioners.

Both the online consultation and workshops referenced professional needs relating to observations. There was consensus that practitioners would need additional training to support their understanding of the reasons for observations, and how they link to developmental pathways. A number of other comments related to the suggested need for practitioners to be provided with learning to support how to effectively observe children, including increased clarity on engagement and interaction levels during these observations, and how to formulate next steps following the observations. There was also mention of training to teach practitioners methods to integrate observations into day-to-day practice. Reference was also made to ensuring that practitioners receive follow-up support, in their setting, after any external training.

Linking with observations, some respondents identified that practitioners may also need support with planning techniques. Concerns were raised throughout the online consultation and workshops that settings may use the tables in the draft assessment arrangements as a tick list to support planning. Additional concerns were raised in the workshops surrounding paperwork that had already been constructed in some settings for planning which seems to go against the holistic nature of the draft assessment arrangements. Thus, individuals expressed the need for consistency in understanding around planning.

Suggestions were made for professional learning to be delivered through a national approach. Concerns were expressed in both the workshops and consultation that without a national approach to professional learning, there is risk of varied delivery and understanding across Wales. In the workshops, a few respondents emphasised the importance of national approaches to training buy-in from Welsh Government, Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales to increase confidence in the approaches.

A few suggestions were also made to extend professional learning to primary school settings for a coherent understanding across the sector to support children's transitions into new settings.

It was noted in the online consultation that the principles of progression are a new concept so settings would need a thorough understandings of these to be able to implement the new assessment arrangements. This was echoed in the workshops, alongside the view that less experienced and new staff would need more support to understand these principles for effective integration of the assessment arrangements.

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Polarised views relating to the delivery method of professional learning were expressed in the online consultation and workshops. Some showed preference towards in-person delivery for practical learning to take place, whereas others liked the flexibility virtual learning offered. This also tied into the differences in delivery model that were suggested, with some in the online consultation recommending Hwb online modules. Suggestions from workshops included sharing good practice examples and the development of an interactive website and/or app to support implementation.

A few respondents to the online consultation highlighted the need for professional learning to focus on the professional dialogue aspect of the arrangements. They thought this would be a new process for many settings. Respondents felt that practitioners would need further support to engage effectively in this dialogue.

Barriers to engaging in professional learning were commonly identified in the workshops, with some references in the online consultation. Barriers included the need for financial support for settings to release staff, a lack of cover staff (exacerbated by recruitment difficulties across the sector), and staff not having the time to attend. It was felt that staff would have a high workload implementing the new curriculum and assessment arrangements, making it even harder to release staff, and that staff may also be less willing to attend training after long shifts.

Workshop participants also explored the following elements in relation to professional learning:

- Peer collaboration for support.
- The need for training for non-Welsh speaking practitioners.
- Practitioner reflection skills development.
- The amount and frequency of professional learning could be a barrier.
- The pitch of training and what organisation(s) should be delivering it.

Barriers and challenges

Comments were shared throughout the online consultation responses that the language used in the draft assessment document may be too complex or jargon-heavy for some practitioners, making it difficult for them to access and adapt into practice without further clarity, guidance or training. Comparisons in the online consultation responses were frequently made with other recent documents, including the new curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, suggesting there were inconsistencies in the language used. These two factors led to respondents commenting that the document is less accessible, especially to inexperienced practitioners. However, comments shared in the workshops suggested the language was mostly consistent.

A view in both the online consultation and workshops was that infographics would make the document more accessible.

Respondents identified that settings face significant time constraints. In particular, professional dialogue was highlighted by respondents as requiring an investment of time for staff across settings. Respondents highlighted that working hours are different in non-maintained settings to schools, saying it would be difficult to organise a suitable time for professional dialogue, especially with nursery settings commonly unable to release staff during working hours. On the other hand, comments regarding time constraints in the workshops related to:

- The length of time needed for setting staff to read and understand the guidance, even before disseminating information to staff.

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- The time required for observation and write-ups.

Consistency of messages and approaches across settings were highlighted as potential challenges. In the online consultation respondents commented that without the draft assessments being shared with school settings, there would be a lack of understanding and a potential lack of awareness of the responsibility for schools to organise professional dialogue between stakeholders. Comments shared in the workshops focussed on the consistency of messages from supporting organisations. There were concerns that differences of opinion on the draft arrangements may cause mixed messages for settings and confusion in relation to what practices they should implement.

Throughout the online consultation, comments were made by some respondents that the experience level of practitioners is a dominant factor relating to their confidence in implementing the assessment changes. They suggested the less experienced practitioners would be the least confident in implementing changes so would need more support and guidance. There were some references made to more experienced staff through the online consultation and workshops, as these practitioners may struggle with the change in approach to assessment as it requires a change in mindset. Thus, it could be harder for them as their practices are more engrained.

The success of the new arrangements, according to consultation responses and workshop participants, would rely on levels of understanding throughout the sector. Comments were raised that in some cases practitioner understanding would be dependent on the insight of their setting leader, who would disseminate information to them. Comments in the workshops also extended to the knowledge and understanding of support and advisory roles. Explicit mention was made to the professional background and qualifications of advisors and inspectors, demonstrating a mismatch with that of early years practitioners which could cause friction.

Questions and concerns

Concerns were expressed through the online consultation and during workshops that settings would use the tables provided in the draft assessment arrangements as a tick list. Respondents to the online consultation felt it was not clear enough that the tables were providing examples to work from, and not intended as a definitive list. In both the online consultation and workshops, respondents expressed their concern that practitioners and settings would create a tick list for assessments, which does not fit with the more holistic approach of the new assessment arrangements.

Discussions in the workshops and responses provided in the online consultation suggested some respondents were confused as to how the new arrangements and curriculum link with the Curriculum for Wales. Calls for more explicit links were made. There were particular concerns that if schools did not have a thorough understanding of the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings and the assessment arrangements, they would not value or effectively use information passed onto them when a child transitions. In the workshops there were also discussions that school nurseries may feel excluded from adopting the same practices due to the title of the document referring to 'non-maintained'.

Discussions in the workshops included challenges the sector is facing as a whole, such as recruitment, loss of experienced leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic and the high levels of responsibility practitioners hold. However, in the online consultation, recruitment was the only one of these concerns mentioned. Respondents suggested a higher number of staff would require

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training to understand and implement the changes in the settings, alongside attending any professional learning and dialogue externally.

There was consensus in the online consultation responses and the workshops that the draft arrangements had not provided clarity surrounding the requirements of assessment language for bilingual or multilingual children. There were calls for greater clarity and additional support to be able to communicate assessment findings to parents. For example, if a child was assessed in Welsh but spoke English at home, the assessment findings may not fully represent the child's ability in English. There was additional mention in the workshops that greater clarity would be needed for children whose home language is neither English nor Welsh.

A need for further clarity in relation to children's next steps and links to progression step 1 were mentioned briefly in the online consultation and workshops. In the former, questions were raised as to what arrangements should be used where a setting has children below the age of 3.

Other questions and concerns raised in the workshops included:

- Calls for clarity regarding what inspectorates would be looking for in practice.
- Suggestions for digitisation through the use of an app, to communicate assessment findings with parents.

Other emerging themes from the workshops

Other themes that were identified in the workshops included:

- The sense that the new approach gave practitioners permission to engage in play-based learning.
- Workshop participants sharing good practice that is already in place and expressing a desire for continued sharing of practice to support settings through their journey of implementing the curriculum and assessment arrangements.
- Suggestions about the need for harmonising guidance across the early years sector, to avoid fragmentation.
- Comments highlighting the importance of *Cynefin* across settings.

Document Specifics

There was regular mention in the online consultation responses and workshops about the layout of the tables in the document. Confusion was expressed as to why literacy and numeracy only had 2 columns, when others had 3. Generally, there was a preference for 3. Concerns were also raised as to how these tables could apply to children with ALN or those more able and talented (MAT), as they are not explicitly referenced and they may be above, or below the suggested expectations.

Some comparisons were made to the layout of the document, and that of the new curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings in both the online consultation and workshops.

Comments suggested a preference for the curriculum document layout as it was felt this was more attractive and accessible. These comments link to previous suggestions about the inclusion of infographics to support accessibility.

In the workshops, there were discussions about new words that had been included in the arrangements that could cause misunderstanding. Examples included 'authentic', 'purposeful' and 'notice'.