

**The Foundation Phase:
Perceptions, Attitudes and Expectations**
**An overview of the ethos and an analysis of the implications of the
implementation**

**MA in Early Years Education
Trinity College Carmarthen**

Sally Thomas

March 2005

Contents

	Page
	8
	9
1.1	10
2.	13
2.1	13
2.2	15
2.3	19
2.4	20
3.	22
3.1	22
3.2	25
3.2.1	25
3.2.2	26
3.2.3	27
3.2.4	29
3.2.5	31
4.	34
4.1	34
4.1.1	34
4.1.2	39
4.1.3	43
4.1.4	44
4.1.5	50
4.1.6	55
4.1.7	64
4.1.8	64
4.1.9	66

4.1.10	Part Four: Providers	69
4.2	Case Study	70
4.2.1	Pilot Questionnaire	71
4.2.2	Case Study Findings	72
4.2.3	Findings on feelings six months into the pilot	74
5.	Summary and Conclusions	77
	Bibliography	81
	Acknowledgements	87
	Appendices	
1	Pilot Questionnaire	88
2	Responses to initial questionnaire from staff at the school in the case study	91
3	Questionnaire	96
4	Written comments included with questionnaire responses	108
5	Frequency statistics based on questionnaire data	113
6	Analysis of data from Part Three and Part Four of the questionnaire	152
7	Case Study – interviews with individual members of staff six months into the pilot	176
8	Welsh Assembly Government consultation with parents, January 2005	180
9	Initial findings of observation in pilot setting	184

List of Tables

No.	Title	Page
1	Frequency statistics relating to respondent's personal details	32
2	Frequency statistics relating to details of the setting	33
3	Frequency statistics relating to the age and size of group worked with	33
4	Table of respondents' qualifications	35
5	Age ranges catered for	37
6	Number of children in respondent's class or group	38
7	Number of respondents who received a copy of the consultation document ' <i>The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years</i> '	42
8	Responses to the National Assembly for Wales on the consultation document ' <i>The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years</i> '	43
9	Responses to the statement 'The Foundation Phase lacks structure'	51
10	Responses to the statement 'The current system works well; it does not need to be changed'	53
11	The Foundation Phase will be difficult to implement due to the lack of outdoor space	56
12	The Foundation Phase will be difficult to implement due to the lack of indoor space	57
13	The Welsh Assembly Government must make a financial commitment to support the initiative	60
14	The support and understanding of Key Stage 2 staff is essential in order to ensure the success of the Foundation Phase	62
15	Training of all staff concerned will be necessary	62
16	Mentors available to the setting	65

List of Graphs

No.	Title	Page
1	Respondent's age and qualification	36
2	Type of setting	37
3	Comparison of pilot and non-pilot settings reading <i>'The Learning Country: A Paving Document'</i>	40
4	Comparison of pilot and non-pilot settings reading <i>'The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years'</i>	41
5	Comparison of pilot and non-pilot settings reading <i>'The Foundation Phase in Wales – A Draft Framework for Children's Learning'</i>	41
6	Excitement about the Foundation Phase	44
7	Apprehension about the Foundation Phase	45
8	Confidence regarding the implementation of the Foundation Phase	45
9	Preparedness for the Foundation Phase	46
9a	Comparison of pilot and non-pilot settings on the self assessment of their preparedness for the Foundation Phase	46
10	The need for further guidance on the implementation of the Foundation Phase	47
11	Looking forward to the challenge of the Foundation Phase	48
12	Creativity and freedom in work with young children	49
13	The Foundation Phase is a backward step	49
14	Comparison of pilot and non-pilot settings on the perception of lack of structure in the Foundation Phase	52
15	Comparison of responses to the statement 'The current system works well; it does not need to be changed', based on the present curriculum used	54
16	Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings: The Foundation Phase encourages building children's self-	55

	esteem and confidence	
17	Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings: The Foundation Phase will be difficult to implement due to lack of outdoor space	56
18	Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings: The Foundation Phase will be difficult to implement due to lack of indoor space	57
19	Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings regarding the lack of staff to implement the required ratios	58
20	Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings regarding the view that ‘this is just another change’	64
21	Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings regarding the desire to visit other settings, centres of excellence	66
22	Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings regarding the desire to have training on classroom organisation	69
23	Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings: In-service training should be provided by Local Education Authorities	69

List of acronyms and abbreviations

ACCAC	Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
ESTYN	Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales
EYE	Early Years Education
HE	Higher Education
INSET	In-service training
LEA	Local Education Authority
NAW	The National Assembly for Wales
OFSTED	Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in England
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SCAA	The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government
WO	Welsh Office

Abstract

The inception of the Welsh Assembly Government and the resultant devolved powers has given Wales autonomy in several areas, one of which is education. The Ministry of Education and Lifelong learning has produced a number of legislative initiatives which have seen policy in Wales and England significantly diverge.

The proposal of a new curriculum for the early years from 3-7 has major financial, social and educational implications for Wales. This study investigates how the Foundation Phase is being trialled in one of the 41 pilot settings across Wales and analyses the feelings and attitudes to the initiative of practitioners in a sample of 94 pilot and non-pilot settings.

The analysis of the research indicated that while many respondents had mixed feelings towards the initiative, the overall reaction was generally positive. A strong desire for guidance and support was expressed but the challenge of delivering the Foundation Phase was welcomed.

1. Introduction

The introduction of the Foundation Phase (*The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years*, (WAG 2003)) in Wales represents a seminal point in the history of education in the United Kingdom. While Scotland and Northern Ireland have traditionally had separate education systems that reflect the national character, needs and the particular political histories of each region, Wales and England have, in the main, had joint legislation covering both countries. There have, however, been some significant differences in legislation affecting the two countries in recent years. The National Curriculum, brought in under the Education Reform Act 1988, was implemented in both countries but addressed the specific needs of a bilingual nation by allocating Welsh as an additional core or foundation subject (dependent upon the school's language status). The introduction, in 1996, of a curriculum for children under compulsory school age also saw a separation of English and Welsh legislation. In England this early years curriculum has undergone a sequence of transformations from *Desirable Outcomes For Children's Learning On Entering Compulsory Education* (SCAA, 1996) through the *Early learning goals* (QCA, 1999) and is now established as the *Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000), while in Wales the *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning before Compulsory School Age* (ACAC, 1996; ACCAC, 2000) has endured until the present time. *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years* (WAG, 2003) signals a further separation not only in the organisation of the curricula but in the ethos and principles that underlie the two countries' education systems.

As Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, Welsh Assembly Government, wrote in the foreword to *The Learning Country: A Paving Document* (WAG, 2001a):

We share strategic goals with our colleagues in England – but we often need to take a different route to achieve them. We shall take our own policy direction where necessary, to get the best for Wales. It's right that we put local authorities, local communities and locally determined needs and priorities at the centre of the agenda for schools,

(WAG, 2001a: 2)

The work presented in this dissertation aims to explore some of the issues surrounding the piloting and subsequent implementation of the Foundation Phase for children aged 3-7 years in Wales and in particular the attitudes and perceptions of the early years practitioners who are working with young children.

1.1 Context

The study of young children and their approaches to learning is not new; many great thinkers since the time of Plato have shown an interest in human development and the principles of learning. Over the last 300 years approaches to learning and teaching have been topics of debate and research, and figures such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori have influenced the systems of today.

The introduction of compulsory schooling at the end of the 19th Century began the state's formal involvement in the education of the nation's children. Certain individuals, both prior to that period and since, have helped to shape the education system that is in place today and, in the field of early years education, figures such as the McMillan sisters have had significant influence upon government policy. For example, the concept of a relationship between education and care that is currently much discussed was a subject that Margaret McMillan fought passionately to have recognised one hundred years ago. She, as a founder member of the Labour Party and a constant campaigner for young children's rights to health and education, influenced legislation such as the Education Act, 1906 which initiated the provision of school meals and government circulars issued in 1929 advocating the provision of nursery schools for children between 2 and 5 years of age. (Cresswell, 1948; Mansbridge, 1932)

Later, psychologists and educationalists such as Piaget, Bruner, Isaacs and Vygotsky raised awareness and promoted debate about young children's learning and the most appropriate methods of promoting that learning. This discussion has come increasingly into the public domain and reports such as Plowden (1967)¹ emphasised

¹ *The Plowden Report, Children and their Primary Schools: A Report of the Central Advisory Council for England* which is out of print is now available on the web. <http://www.dg.dial.pipex.com/plowden>

the significance of the early years and introduced the importance of understanding young children and their development, rather than education merely being considered as a method of instruction.

In the later part of the 20th Century however, there appeared, with the Education Act of 1988 and the implementation of the National Curriculum, to be a movement towards a more formally structured curriculum for children in school, and latterly the pressure has increased to begin that formal schooling at an earlier and earlier age, the majority of four year olds in Wales are already in school despite the age for compulsory schooling being the term after the child's fifth birthday.

The implementation of the Foundation Phase in Wales could be seen as a return to the child-centred approach to education popular in the 1970s and is certainly a departure from the process in England that appears to be continuing along the path of increased formality in learning for even the youngest of pupils. Indeed, this is a topic of debate in the current election campaign where the Conservative Party have pledged to focus on reading and numeracy for young children (as well as being 'tougher on discipline'). They are promising to make changes and begin the process within one month of the election with the help of the former Chief Inspector for Schools, Chris Woodhead (Radio 4 Today programme 7.3.05). As Wales' National Assembly is unlikely to be dissolved or lose its education remit this change in policy and direction in Wales could be considered to have even more significance.

This research aims to explore some of the reasons for this apparent move away from the formality of the developing system in England and how the practitioners who are presently piloting the Foundation Phase, and those who could be implementing these changes over the next four years, feel about the proposals. Through a variety of research methods the perception, attitudes and expectations of practitioners faced with the implementation will be investigated and the findings discussed.

2. Literature Review

The proposed curriculum emerged in the form of a consultative document, *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years*, in February 2003(WAG, 2003). This had been preceded 18 months earlier by *The Learning Country: A Paving Document* (WAG, 2001a). As these documents are relatively recent and there is little published material on the subject the literature review will concentrate on relevant research that may have informed the policy makers and the policy documents themselves. It will also briefly explore the political history that led to these reforms.

2.1 Early years tradition

The Foundation Phase advocates a carefully planned play based curriculum that aims to:

help children learn how to learn; develop thinking skills; and
acquire positive attitudes to lifelong learning.

(WAG, 2003: 12)

There is a long and strong tradition of play, learning through play and the holistic nature of young children's learning. This tradition dates back to the work of educational theorists such as Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) and Maria Montessori (1870–1952). Froebel, himself influenced by Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Rousseau (1712–1778), developed a child-centred curriculum based on observation of the child and the provision of 'gifts' (resources) and 'occupations' (activities). The role of the adult was to nurture the child's development and support the natural unfolding of their learning processes by providing the appropriate activities based on observation and the interpretation of the child's needs (Heafford 1967; Hayward 1904, 1905; Woodham-Smith 1969; Bowen 1966).

Montessori also emphasised the importance of observation and developed a method of working with young children based on her work with children who had what would now be termed special educational needs or additional educational needs. She developed a range of resources that supported children's learning through carefully structured and graduated activities. The Montessori teacher's role is to guide the child's learning as opposed to directing it, and the importance of routine and the use of the senses is emphasised. Her influence can be seen in the form of child sized

resources and differentiated activities in all schools, not solely in the dedicated Montessori Schools (which have a strong following in the private sector). As Smith wrote of the Montessori system in 1912:

In the plays and lessons constant use is made of the principle of establishing the associations between visual, muscular, tactile and auditory sensations.

(Smith, 1912)

Montessori herself describes the use of the materials to educate the senses as follows:

Our didactic material renders auto-education possible, permits a methodical education of the senses. Not upon the ability of the teacher does such education rest, but upon the didactic system. This presents objects which, first, attract the spontaneous attention of the child, and, second, contain a rational gradation of stimuli.

(Montessori, 1915: 174-175)

The role of the adult as provider of a stimulating and appropriate environment, who facilitates and encourages the child's learning rather than actively teaching the child, has continued to be a popular model in early years teaching.

Before the advent of state education and the introduction of compulsory schooling in 1870, the education of young children was very much dependent on their family's financial and social status. Pioneers such as Robert Owen (1771-1858), a Welshman and socialist, set up schools to educate the children of his mill workers. The reason he gave for this philanthropic act was to promote social improvement but it was claimed that financial gains were also made due to the increased productivity of happy workers with happy children. The concept that early education and social, political and financial benefit are connected was one of the presumptions used in *The Learning Country: A Paving Document* (WAG: 2001a) to demonstrate the need for investment in this area of education.

The connection between socialism, education and care was continued in the work of the McMillan sisters. Margaret McMillan (1860–1931) and her sister Rachel (1859 - 1917)

developed Froebel and Pestalozzi's ideas of environmental education and began the 'nursery in a garden' movement that is very much in vogue today. The relationship between education and health was a cornerstone of the McMillan's philosophy. They

fought for health clinics, well ventilated schools and recognised the need for children to be happy, healthy and comfortable in order to learn. The central concept of the proposed Foundation Phase curriculum is that of children's well-being, which is also fundamental to traditional good early years practice. (Cresswell 1948; Mansbridge 1932)

While Margaret McMillan had acted according to a strong political and social belief, the work of Susan Isaacs, whose text *The Nursery Years* was first published in 1929, wrote and campaigned with the evidence of science and research behind her. As she stated in the opening section of *The Nursery Years*:

The important thing about this change in our belief as to what is best for children's bodies [referring to child rearing practices] is that it is not just a change of custom, nor the passing of one tradition in favour of another. It is that mothers and nurses have begun to turn away from mere custom and blind tradition, to science.

(Isaacs, 1946: 2)

Isaacs valued play as children's work and stressed its importance in providing a medium through which children could express themselves. She continued to shape and add weight to early years education with her influential text *The Educational Value of the Nursery School* (first published in 1954) which emphasised the intellectual and educational value of early years education. Isaacs' work and that of Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky, in the associated field of psychology led, it could be argued, to the popularity of what was termed 'child-centred active learning' in the 1960s and 1970s.

2.2 Research

Research has continued to inform early years practice up to the present day. For example, recent neurological research demonstrates what many practitioners and early years educational theorists have long believed – the importance of the first few years of life. The brain is well developed at birth and continues to expand rapidly in the first year, making new synaptic connections, linking neurons and developing pathways. Research suggests that at about 2 years of age there is a pruning of the brain's dendritic system and unused or rarely used connections appear to be deleted.

The brain at first *over-produces* neural connections and then as a result of experience or learning, subsequently *trims* them back so that only a smaller percentage of the initial connections actually end up surviving and being used throughout life. Only the synapses which are stabilised or consolidated through usage will be maintained.

(Changeux and Deaene, 1989; Huttenlocher, 1990 in Catherwood, 1999: 30)

This finding has significance for those working with young children as it suggests that those early experiences that help to make synaptic connections and regularly use pathways are essential in ensuring that the child retains the full capacity of the brain. The term ‘window of opportunity’ has been used to describe the optimum time for a child to experience and develop in particular areas. For example as Nash points out:

There appears to be a series of windows for developing language. The window for acquiring syntax may close as early as five or six years of age, while the window for adding new words may never close.

(Nash, 1997: 7)

Evidence from research on educational approaches in other countries is also being used to inform practice. The work of Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson, in Sweden, and others is being used to argue the case for delaying the starting of formal education here in Wales and is reflected in the ethos of learning through play and learning the skills to learn demonstrated in the proposed Foundation Phase.

Substantial research evidence suggests that children do not begin to benefit from extensive formal teaching until about the age of 6 or 7 in line with their social and cognitive development. An earlier introduction can result in some children underachieving and attaining lower standards.

(WAG, 2003: 18)

In most European countries where formal education does not begin until the age of seven or eight, the idea that children could be sitting at desks at three or four years of age is abhorrent to most pedagogues and indeed many parents² (BBC, Panorama ‘*Four Year Olds in School*’ 1998, Channel Four, Dispatches ‘*Too Much Too Young*’ 1998). Evidence provided from work in countries such as Denmark, Italy and New Zealand is used as support for the argument encouraging children to be actively

² When the researcher was working on an exchange in Denmark in the mid 1990s a referendum was held to evaluate public opinion on lowering the school starting age from 7 to 6 years of age. This was rejected by a large majority.

involved in their own learning, as advocated in the Foundation Phase document (WAG, 2003: 14).

In recent years the UK government has commissioned reports and research projects on early years education both here and in other countries, for example, the OFSTED report on three national systems *The Education of six year olds in England, Denmark and Finland* (OFSTED, 2003) and *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project* (Sylva et al. 2003). These projects have in turn influenced policy³.

The findings of the EPPE project included evidence that:

Pre-school experience, compared to none, enhances children's development...

Disadvantaged children in particular can benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially if they attend centres that cater for a mixture of children from different

social backgrounds...

The quality of pre-school centres is directly related to better intellectual/cognitive and social/behavioural development in children...

Where settings view educational and social development as complementary and equal in importance, children make better all round progress.

The quality of the learning environment of the home (where parents are actively engaged in activities with children) promoted intellectual and social development in all children.

(Sylva et al. 2003: 1)

These findings reflect previous research such as that of David Weikart in *The Perry Pre-School Project* which is arguably the most important single study in the field of early years and the social context. Weikart began his studies in the 1960s in Ypsilanti, United States, working with African-American children from disadvantaged homes. He studied the effects of different pre-school experiences on life outcomes. In publishing his findings of 30 years of study in the early 1990s (when the subjects were 27 years of age) Weikart firmly established links between financial investment in the early years and later savings on social services – what is now known as the 7:1 principle. That is, for every dollar spent on pre-school

³ Two of the researchers and authors of the EPPE project, Professor Kathy Sylva and Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford, are part of the monitoring and evaluation team for the implementation of the Foundation Phase and are using evidence from the EPPE project when addressing pilot settings. (23.2.05 Foundation Phase Pilot Conference, Mold, North Wales).

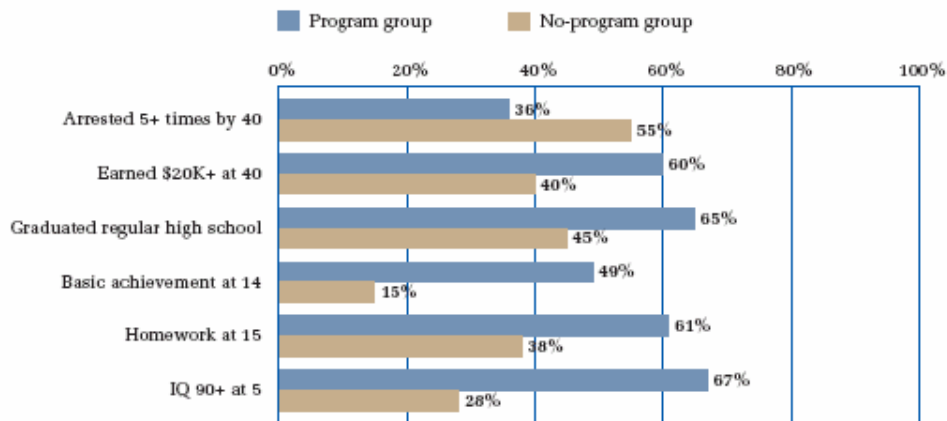
provision seven dollars will be saved from social services bills at a later date. Interestingly when the findings at age 40 were published more recently this benefit had increased further - to more than 12: 1.

In constant 2000 dollars discounted at 3%, the economic return to society of the Perry Preschool program was \$258,888 per participant on an investment of \$15,166 per participant—\$17.07 per dollar invested. Of that return, \$195,621 went to the general public—\$12.90 per dollar invested (as compared to \$7.16 in the age-27 benefit-cost analysis)

(Schweinhart, No date: 3)

The Perry Pre-School research indicated, just as the EPPE project has, that any form of pre-school experience enhances children’s development. However, it is the results relating to social aspects in later life that are most often quoted. The figure below outlines the major findings. The most significant of these relate to *IQ* (Intelligence Quotient) and *basic achievement at 14* but possibly the most interesting is the difference in the number of times the subjects had been arrested.

Figure 1
Major Findings: High/Scope Perry Preschool Study at 40



(Schweinhart, No date: 2)

These results again give weight to the argument for increased investment in early years education outlined in *The Learning Country: A Paving Document* (WAG, 2001a) and *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years* (WAG, 2003). In addition to the financial argument, the Perry Pre-School study is specifically referred to in the Foundation Phase document as an example of good practice in terms of pedagogical approach:

The High/Scope Perry Pre-School study in America also suggests that allowing children to make decisions about the activities they undertake helps them improve their social and interpersonal skills. This has a positive impact on their long-term personal and social development.

(WAG, 2003: 14)

2.3 Policy and state involvement in education

The links being made between education and financial and social benefits to society reflect increasing state involvement in children's lives. The ethical debate surrounding who has responsibility for children's welfare – the state, the family, the community (or communities) they belong to - is becoming increasingly politicised. The Children Act 1989 allocated rights and responsibilities for aspects of children's lives. As education has become more firmly linked to life long opportunities, the role of educational establishments in the maintained and non-maintained sector has widened. Legislation and Government guidelines on the subject of early years seem to have increased exponentially since the first interest shown by The Plowden Report 1967. The changes that were expected after Plowden did not materialise and promises of nursery education for all those 3 and 4 year olds whose parents wanted it (advocated by Margaret Thatcher when Minister for Education in 1972) is still to become a national right.

The Major government in 1994 implemented changes in policy and public finance that resulted in the two *Desirable Outcomes* documents for England and Wales (1996). The legislative picture since this time has become increasingly confused with a plethora of documents and policy. Nursery Vouchers were introduced in 1995 by the Conservative administration and almost immediately repealed by New Labour in 1997. This change of UK government in 1997 led to considerably enhanced political and financial investment in young children and their families. Tackling child poverty was high on the agenda and there was legislation relating to daycare regulations (1998) and childcare (1999). Various initiatives led to the development of local authority Early Years Partnerships and training and support organisations such as Sure Start. The educational initiatives continued: Baseline Assessment was introduced in 1998 (ACCAC, 1998) along with *The National Literacy Strategy* (DfEE, 1998) and *The National Numeracy Strategy* (DfEE, 1999), these two being guidance only in Wales.

2.4 The Foundation Phase

The concept of a new curriculum for Wales was launched by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2001 with *The Learning Country: A Paving Document* (WAG, 2001a). Whilst this document did not focus on early years - its remit was to develop 'A Comprehensive Education and Lifelong Learning Programme to 2010 in Wales' - it highlighted the importance of early years in providing strong foundations for lifelong learning and achievement. It set out proposals for a 'statutory foundation phase with a curriculum extending from age 3 to 7' (WAG, 2001a: 20). This curriculum was to be based on the following principles:

Early years provision:-

- Offers a development curriculum in harmony with each child's particular needs and interests;
- Provides scope for all children to reach their potential and take their full place in society on the basis of equal opportunities;
- Builds partnerships between parents, families, carers, childminders, nurseries, playgroups and schools in both the maintained and non-maintained sectors to develop 'wrap-around' care; and
- Is guided and nurtured by suitably qualified practitioners able to improve standards and integrate education and care effectively.

(WAG, 2001a:15)

The emphasis on active learning through practical activity reminiscent of the Froebel tradition is reflected in the requirements of the new curriculum:

Best practice in Wales involves a broad and balanced curriculum... Children learn through practical activities that necessarily challenge and motivate. Well planned practical activities help children to develop their curiosity and independence as well as their knowledge, skills and understanding.

(WAG, 2003: 11)

The Foundation Phase document has the individual child's well-being at its heart and is intended to promote a developmentally appropriate approach to young children's education that will help children develop a positive attitude to learning. There is evidence that this approach to early years education is being carefully watched from

over the border in England. In an article exploring the implications of research by Locke and Ginsborg (Sheffield) Charlotte Dennis- Jones wrote:

Perhaps the education system in England should assess more closely the methods adopted by the National Assembly of Wales. Having recently abolished SATs at key stage one, the foundation stage in Wales is now being extended to years one and two.

(Dennis-Jones, 2002)

3. Methodology

There has been a less rigid approach to research methodology in recent years. The traditional separation between qualitative and quantitative methods of research are being increasingly blurred, particularly in social science and educational research.

No approach depends solely on one method any more than it would exclude a method merely because it is labelled 'quantitative', 'qualitative', 'case study', 'action research' or whatever. (Bell, 1993: 63)

A variety of research methods have been used in the preparation of this dissertation. Triangulation is the term used for collecting and analysing data from a range of sources. The work presented here uses triangulated data from questionnaires, case study, interviews and public policy documents.

A case study gives first hand evidence of the working of the pilot project using a Welsh medium primary school in South Wales. Some opportunistic sampling was used; making use of the staff in the pilot school to compile suitable questions for a questionnaire that was sent to the other 40 pilot settings and the schools that work in partnership with Trinity College, Carmarthen's School of Initial Teacher Education and Training. There will also be secondary research contained in the literature review which will set the study in context and explore the historical events that have led to and culminated in the Learning Country initiative by the Welsh Assembly Government.

3.1 Case Study

The case study relates to a Welsh Medium Primary School in South Wales that is one of the 41 pilot settings selected by the Welsh Assembly Government to trial The Foundation Phase (with reference to *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years* (WAG 2003) and *The Foundation Phase in Wales – A Draft Framework for Children's Learning* (ACCAC 2004)). The pilot began with the nursery and reception classes within the school in September 2004.

Children enter the school's nursery class at three years of age and transfer to the local Welsh medium comprehensive school at 11 years of age. There are approximately

350 pupils at the school, 15% of whom come from Welsh speaking homes. The ESTYN inspection report of January, 2001 described the catchment area as urban, with 10% of the children coming from prosperous areas and the rest from neither economically advantaged nor disadvantaged areas. The school intake represents the full range of ability but the numbers registered as eligible for free school meals was substantially lower than that for either the area or for Wales as a whole. (ESTYN, 2001)⁴

Following an INSET day the previous year, undertaken by staff of the School of Early Years Education at Trinity (EYE), the school had approached the School of EYE for advice and support in this initial stage of the pilot and with the headteacher's and staff's consent the work began that was incorporated into this study.

The support took the form of a series of in-service training days for the whole staff (teaching and support staff) as well as regular visits from the early years team to work alongside the staff of the reception (predominantly) and nursery in the classroom setting. (The term 'classroom setting' refers to the wider learning environment; not just the indoor classroom area but the outside space, playground and local park).

Two staff members also joined the early years' students and two tutors on a School of EYE visit to Rachel McMillan Nursery School in Deptford, London to investigate good practice in early years education, with particular reference to learning experiences offered in the outdoor environment.

The following discussion relates, primarily, to the experiences of the staff and children in the reception classes as it was felt by the school that these classes, rather than the nursery class, would find the transition to the new curriculum more challenging. The nursery class had been working with the *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning before Compulsory School Age* document (ACCAC, 2000) since its inception in 1996, whereas the reception classes had been using a mixture of this, *The National Numeracy Strategy* (DfEE, 1999), a mathematics' scheme (*Y Flaen Mathematig* [OUP/Drake, no date]), local education authority guidance and, to a

⁴ Difficulties were encountered in accessing the most recent inspection report from the ESTYN website. On request the school provided a hard copy of the relevant report

lesser extent, *The National Literacy Strategy* (DfEE, 1998). The teaching staff in the reception class are continuing to make use of *Y Flaen Mathematig* during the piloting of the Foundation Phase but are now using this far less frequently and as a resource for ideas and activities rather than as a means of recording children's progress.

The staff and children of the setting were very welcoming and inclusive. Changes had already been made to the routine of the day in the reception classes. The staffing had been increased in order to bring it in line with the requirements of the Foundation Phase, giving a ratio of staff to children of 1:8 (WAG 2003:23-24). The two classes were working together in connecting rooms and the support staff were shared. The staff included two qualified teachers and a variety of support staff working a mixture of full and part time and with some staff shared between the nursery and reception classes. (The qualifications of all the early years staff are detailed in section 3.2.1 of this chapter).

The children were allowed to make choices within the confines of the activities provided daily by the staff and which were, in the main, planned on short term and mid-term models of planning. However, children were required to participate in particular activities at some time during the session, the day or the week. The staff would choose children from the class list (apparently at random) and call them to the activity. These activities included art and craft work and some literacy and numeracy activities. The staff (both teaching and non-teaching) were allocated specific responsibility for areas or activities, again on a daily basis. There were also whole class activities such as registration, snack time, outdoor play, lunch and home time. There was no grouping of children apart from into their two class groups for registration, snack time, outdoor play and other whole group activities.

After an initial period of observation the reception class staff and the early years team (the researcher and one colleague from the School of EYE) discussed a range of issues and reflected on current practice. Issues explored included the allocation of activities to particular adults and whether certain curriculum areas such as literacy and numeracy were being given more weight and therefore valued more highly than others. The differentiation of activities between teachers, nursery nurses and learning support assistants was discussed. A major area that was considered was the

compulsory nature of specific activities and the reasoning behind this practice; why, for example, it was felt important for children to take part in particular structured activities, such as letter work or a mathematical game while they were not specifically encouraged to take part in block work or imaginative play. The staff were also encouraged to reflect on how children were called to attend these compulsory activities: was the child's present activity taken into account; if the child was immersed in another task was s/he left to continue? The importance of observation and careful and appropriate intervention was raised here.

In addition to these discussions and individual and group interviews, a pilot questionnaire was designed to inform the researcher on suitable and appropriate topics for inclusion in the final questionnaire to be sent to all Foundation Phase pilot settings in Wales. The need for a bilingual questionnaire was recognised due to the nature of Wales as a bilingual nation. Advice was sought on the most appropriate way of designing bilingual questionnaires as the requirements of both Trinity College's Welsh Language Scheme (implemented and agreed with the Welsh Language Board in 2003, under the Welsh Language Act 1993), and of good practice implications of equal opportunities, meant that settings would need to be offered a choice of responding in either Welsh or in English.

3.2 Questionnaire

3.2.1 Pilot questionnaire

A pilot questionnaire was produced (see Appendix 1) and given, by hand, to 12 early years' staff members at the pilot school. The sample was opportunistic and included all the staff members who were involved and working with children in the nursery and reception classes. These adults included teachers, nursery nurses and as yet unqualified members of staff. The recipients were: three teachers (one with a B.Ed. and two with teaching certificates); 6 nursery nurses (with an NNEB qualification); one learning support assistant with an NVQ III in Child Care and Education and one working towards this qualification; and one member of staff with a degree in English and a Diploma in Further Education for Mentally Handicapped Adults (this member of staff has responsibility for a child with language difficulties). The covering letter (see Appendix 1) gave a brief explanation of the purpose of the exercise and this was

also explained verbally to individual staff members when the questionnaire was introduced. Self addressed envelopes were also included in order that confidentiality was maintained and to encourage free and honest responses from the participants. The results were collected 1 week later.

All 12 participants responded (see Appendix 2 for a transcript of the responses). The areas of interest selected for this pilot questionnaire were attitudes towards the Foundation Phase and Training, support and guidance needs. These were chosen, as previously stated, in order to produce a meaningful questionnaire for the early years' staff of the other 40 pilot settings and 165 partnership schools.

Findings of the pilot questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2 (analysis of the data in 4.2.1). Following the analysis of these responses a first draft of the full questionnaire was produced and piloted by staff in the Faculty of Education at Trinity College. Due to the constraints of time it was not possible to conduct a more appropriate pilot sample of this first draft. Following the piloting of the questionnaire, some adaptations were made to both the format and the wording. These included, for example, the inclusion of identification numbers and additional reasons why a response had not been given to the consultative document *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7* (WAG, 2003) (Question 12).

3.2.2 Ethical considerations

All research must comply with a range of ethical considerations which form the framework of good practice for research. Acknowledging bilingualism and the opportunity for respondents to use either language, when responding to questionnaires, is an important principle of equal opportunity and could also be considered an example of good ethical practice.

Permission to participate in the research – or not to participate – was outlined in the covering letter. This also included an adherence to other principles such as confidentiality, rights of participants, and anonymity.

The case study and interviews present other and additional ethical requirements for the researcher, such as the power relationship between the interviewer and the subject.

Staff at the case study school needed to be reassured that their thoughts, fears and concerns would be kept in confidence. The researcher must, as Green suggests:

...think about how the outcomes of (your) work will be used
and who will have access to it.

(Green, 2000: 77)

It is not unreasonable to suggest that early years staff in primary schools are perhaps not always the most vocal or powerful within the hierarchy of staff. Concerns about whether their thoughts would be shared with more senior staff within the school are areas of legitimate ethical consideration. (Graue and Walsh, 1998 Ch 5; Christensen and James, 2003).

3.2.3. Questionnaire

The initial findings from the pilot questionnaire were utilised and incorporated into a detailed questionnaire (see Appendix 3) that was sent to 201 settings. These settings included 39 out of the 41 pilot settings for the Foundation Phase and 162 schools that work in partnership with Trinity College. These settings included Nursery, Infant and Primary Schools as well as Day Nurseries, Play Groups, Cylchoedd Meithrin and a childminder. Three of the settings are both pilot settings and Trinity College Partnership schools.

As stated previously, the main questionnaire was produced bilingually as it was targeted at both Welsh and English medium settings. Participants were invited to respond in whichever language they preferred and to provide additional written comments if they wished. (These additional comments have been reproduced and can be found in Appendix 4). The settings were also invited to copy the questionnaires if more than one staff member wished to respond.

The questionnaires were sent out addressed specifically to the early years' staff of each setting as it was the opinion of these staff members that was being sought.

The questionnaire was designed to investigate the feelings of early years' staff regarding the Foundation Phase and its implementation. It hoped to explore the

implications for the children involved and determine the issues that staff highlighted as important to the success of the new curriculum. To this end the statements given in Part Three of the questionnaire (Appendix 3) were organised into three sections and within these sections opposing views were deliberately interspersed to avoid respondents habitually answering successively down one column without considering their response to that particular statement.

The design also incorporated questions regarding the documentation relating to the Foundation Phase, access to these papers as well as the consultation process linked to the draft documents. These were included in order to determine the success of the dissemination of information about the Foundation Phase generally and the interest of the relevant staff in the initiative.

The final section (Part Four) of the questionnaire was included in direct response to a request by the staff of the case study school for additional training, support and guidance and in order to assess the perceived needs of other settings and their requirements for this kind of support. The questions were designed to elicit information and data about the types of support and training needed or required (or perceived as being needed and required) in addition to identifying those agencies considered to be the most appropriate providers.

The personal details of the respondents and the details of their settings were requested in order to provide the option of exploring the factors that might influence practitioners' responses to the questions and statements and ultimately to the Foundation Phase itself.

The sample for the questionnaire was chosen as the researcher had access to Trinity College's partnership schools and the details of the pilot schools were readily available through the WAG website (www.learning.wales.gov.uk/foundationphase/pilot-settings). Only the partnership schools with children under the age of seven were included in the sample (this represented 92% of the schools in the partnership). It was intended that all the pilot

settings (41) would receive a questionnaire but two settings could not be contacted through the details given on the website and were therefore not included.⁵

3.2.4 Returns

A total of 96 questionnaires were returned from 77 different settings. An issue that has arisen when calculating the percentage returns is that additional copies were sent by some settings. The number of additional responses received (up to six in one pilot setting) suggests that there was a real desire, by staff of all kinds, to have their voices heard and to participate in the exercise. However 2 questionnaires could not be used as more than one staff member had responded on the same sheet and it was not clear who had made which responses. Therefore a total of 94 questionnaires have been included for data analysis.

On receipt of the responses and during the data input some shortcomings were realised. In Part One several sections were answered in ways that prevented simple data submission. Question 3 asked the respondent to indicate their qualifications and whilst this was not an issue in most cases there were several returns where a respondent had indicated more than one qualification. When this was the case the highest relevant qualification was submitted, for example when both a level III nursery nursing qualification and a BAEd (with Early Years) were given, the BAEd was noted as the qualification for data analysis. However, those questionnaires where the respondent had both a nursery nursing and a teaching qualification were kept to one side as this could be a factor worth investigating in terms of factors that influence responses.

The age range covered in the settings was found to be inadequate in the original questionnaire and so an additional value was allocated to settings catering for children from 4–11 years of age (as this had been stated on 3 returns). Other returns included two responses such as 3-5 years and 5-11 years and were therefore recorded as 3-11 years and so on. An additional value also had to be added to question 5 (the type of setting) as *Childminder* had not been included despite the questionnaire going to such

⁵ In line with ethical requirements, the researcher contacted the WAG webdeveloper to indicate errors in information provided on the website.

a setting. One school setting catered for children from 3-19 years but this setting was included in the range 3-11 years for the purpose of this study.

The responses indicating the age of the class or group (Question 8) proved the most problematic when recording the data received. The number of vertically grouped or mixed age range classes (33) had not been anticipated and therefore recoding in the data code book was necessary. Additional values were added to incorporate all the respondents' situations. This meant, however, there were then 15 different values for this one question and may mean values will have to be collapsed into groups such as 0-3, 3-5, 5-7 years and so on when analysing the data. There were two cases where the age group of the class was not given, one was a headteacher for whom the question did not apply but no reason was given in the other case for this omission.

In addition to the responses to the set questions and statements it was also recorded which language respondents had used. This was included in the data base as it may be a useful factor to consider in further studies. It also confirmed the need to provide the questionnaire in both English and Welsh as 31 returns were in Welsh (33%) and 63 were in English (67%).

There were a small number of returns where the respondent had failed to answer several questions. However, as these numbers were small they were still included in the final data base. See Appendices 5 and 6 for the final results and also the following section on checking the data for further detail.

3.2.5 Checking the data

Once the database from the 94 returns that could be used was complete it was necessary to undertake a thorough check of that data: an essential process, as even a small error in the input can distort the results and therefore influence the analysis. Initially, the results were printed out and checked by eye for missing answers. Nil responses were then verified by checking the original questionnaires. The SPSS⁶ system for screening and cleaning data was then used to identify and locate rogue responses and input errors (Pallant, 2001: Ch 5).

⁶ SPSS appears not to be an acronym but a brand name for a data handling programme

SPSS is a software programme designed to aid data analysis and provide a format for the presentation of that data. It allows the use of a range of statistical techniques to explore the data that has been collected and the relationships among variables.

The checking of scores out of range⁷ was completed through a process of analysing descriptive statistics and frequencies (Pallant, 2001:43). The scores in this survey use exclusively categorical variables therefore the method used for verifying data was that recommended by the SPSS programme guide for categorical variables (Pallant, 2001:43).

The process was carried out for each of the sections in turn. The sections were divided into mathematically manageable and context based groups. For example, the first section chosen related to the respondent's personal details (Part one: questions 1-4, see Appendix 3 for a copy of the questionnaire). The frequency statistics for this section were as follows:

Statistics					
		Gender	Age	Qualifications	Year qualification obtained
N	Valid	94	94	93	94
	Missing	0	0	1	0
Minimum		1	1	1	2
Maximum		2	4	9	6

*Table 1
Frequency statistics relating to respondent's personal details*

This indicates that there were no responses out of range, although under the heading of 'age' the final value (5) 60-69 years had no responses. It also revealed that one return contained a nil response for 'qualifications'; this was then verified by checking with the original questionnaire that was returned.

⁷ The range of scores relates to the numbered responses allocated to each question. If, for example, a score of 6 had been recorded for a question where the possible responses ranged from 1 to 5 this would indicate an error in input.

This process was repeated for each of the following selected sections:

- Details of setting (relating to Part One: Questions 5-7 in the questionnaire)
- Age and size of group of children (Part One: Questions 8 and 9)
- Documentation and consultation (Part Two: Questions 10 to 12)
- Feelings towards the Foundation Phase (Part Three: Question 13)
- Implications for children (Part Three: Question 14)
- Key issues (Part Three: Question 15)
- Training Needs (Part Four: Questions 16 to 18) and
- Language of response

Full details of the results of this checking process can be seen in Appendix 5.

Note that in ‘Details of setting’ (see Table 2 below) the frequency statistics indicate a maximum of 7 for age range and 5 for type of setting whereas the original questionnaire only gave possible responses of 1-6 and 1-4 respectively. As stated previously one additional value was added to each of these questions in response to the returns received.

Statistics

		Age range setting caters for	Type of setting	Is the setting a pilot setting?
N	Valid	94	94	94
	Missing	0	0	0
Minimum		1	1	1
Maximum		7	5	2

*Table 2
Frequency statistics relating to details of the setting*

The range of values for Question 8, relating to the age range of the children in the group, was also increased due to the responses received and in order to accommodate mixed age range groups. This explains the maximum value of 15 rather than 7.

Statistics

		Age of children in the group/class	Number of children in the group/class
N	Valid	92	91
	Missing	2	3
Minimum		3	1
Maximum		15	5

Table 3
Frequency statistics relating to the age and size of group worked with

A warning of incorrect data was given when checking 'Feelings towards the Foundation Phase' (Question 13). This warning was investigated but not substantiated; the checking process was repeated and no error was found and the warning was not repeated.

There were no inputting or data errors revealed in any of the sections. However, this verification process did highlight possible areas of interest for analysis, such as the level of response to consultation, reasons for a lack of response, and the number of respondents who had not read or received the documentation. These issues will be explored later.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Questionnaire Results

The final questionnaire (see Appendix 3) was sent to 201 settings. The recipients were 39 out of the 41 pilot settings for the Foundation Phase and 162 schools that work in partnership with Trinity College, Carmarthen. These settings included Nursery, Infant and Primary Schools as well as Day Nurseries, Play Groups, Cylchoedd Meithrin and a childminder. Three of the settings are both pilot settings and partners with the college.

96 returns were received from 77 settings, two were not in an accessible format (as previously discussed) and therefore a total of 94 questionnaires have been included for data analysis. (See Appendix 5 for the full set of tables relating to the frequency of results).

The first 8 responses were received by return of post and a further 36 arrived within 1 week of the mailing. This could be interpreted as an indication that the target group were engaged with and interested in the topic. A further 8 responses were received after the deadline and when the inputting of data had been completed. These final responses were therefore not used in this study.

4.1.1 Part One: Details of the respondents and their setting

Nearly 95% (89 out of the 94) of the respondents were female, which was to be expected as the questionnaires were addressed to the early years' staff in the various settings and these staff are almost exclusively female. The age range of the respondents was relatively evenly spread: 14.9% were aged between 20 and 29, 23.4% between 30 and 39, 33% between 40 and 49 and 28.7% between 50 and 59. There were no respondents over the age of 60.

38.4 % of the respondents had qualifications that directly related to their work in the early years, that is, they had a BAEd (including Early Years), a nursery nursing qualification or a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level II or III in Child Care and Education. There were also 20.2% who had a Post Graduate Certificate in Education, and therefore could have had relevant college and placement experience

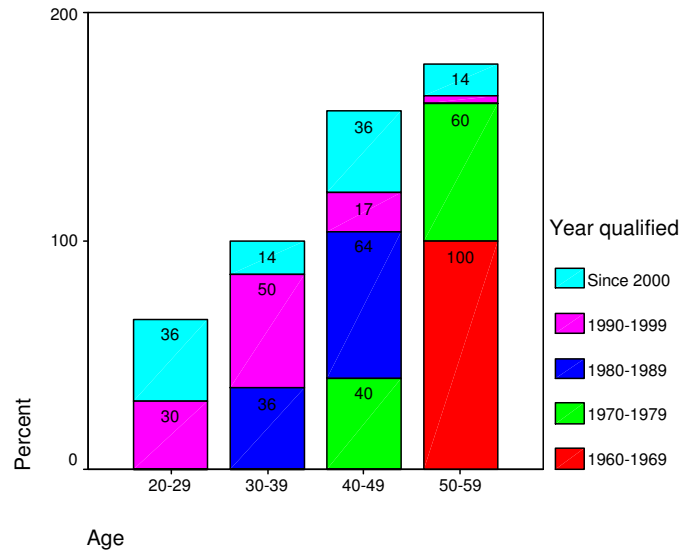
dependent on when and where they qualified and their teaching practice opportunities. The other 40.3% had a BAEd (Primary without Early Years), other qualifications (including 11 Teaching Certificates) or had not stated their qualification. There was 1 missing response (1.1%). See Table 4 below for details.

Qualifications

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BAEd (including Early Years)	26	27.7	28.0	28.0
	BAEd (Primary without Early Years)	18	19.1	19.4	47.3
	PGCE Primary	19	20.2	20.4	67.7
	Nursery Nursing (NNEB, BTEC, ND, DCE)	3	3.2	3.2	71.0
	NVQ in Child Care and Education level III	4	4.3	4.3	75.3
	NVQ in Child Care and Education level II	3	3.2	3.2	78.5
	Other	20	21.3	21.5	100.0
	Total	93	98.9	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.1		
Total		94	100.0		

*Table 4
Table of respondents' qualifications*

The date the relevant qualification was obtained was recorded as this could be considered a factor in responses when compared to the contemporary research and views in education at the time of training. Also, when the respondent's age and date of qualification are compared (see Graph 1 below), this indicates the percentages who have qualified at different ages, that is, it gives some indication of mature students entering the profession. It also reveals that several respondents who are in the 50-59 year age group have either only recently qualified or gained a higher qualification in the last 4 years. This, in turn, could be seen as beneficial to the children and educational system as a whole as new or additionally qualified staff are entering the profession all the time and, hopefully, bringing new and current ideas and practice into the settings.



*Graph 1
Respondent's age and year of qualification*

The year of qualification of the respondents was also analysed to investigate if any particular cohort was over- or under-represented. There were no respondents who had qualified prior to 1960, 6.4% qualified between 1960 and 1969, 31.9% between 1970 and 1979, 14.9% 1980-89, 31.9% 1990-99 and 14.9% in the four years since 2000. (There was 100% response to this question). The only cohort that appears under-represented, apart from the 1960-69 graduates who may well have retired, was the group that qualified during the 1980s.

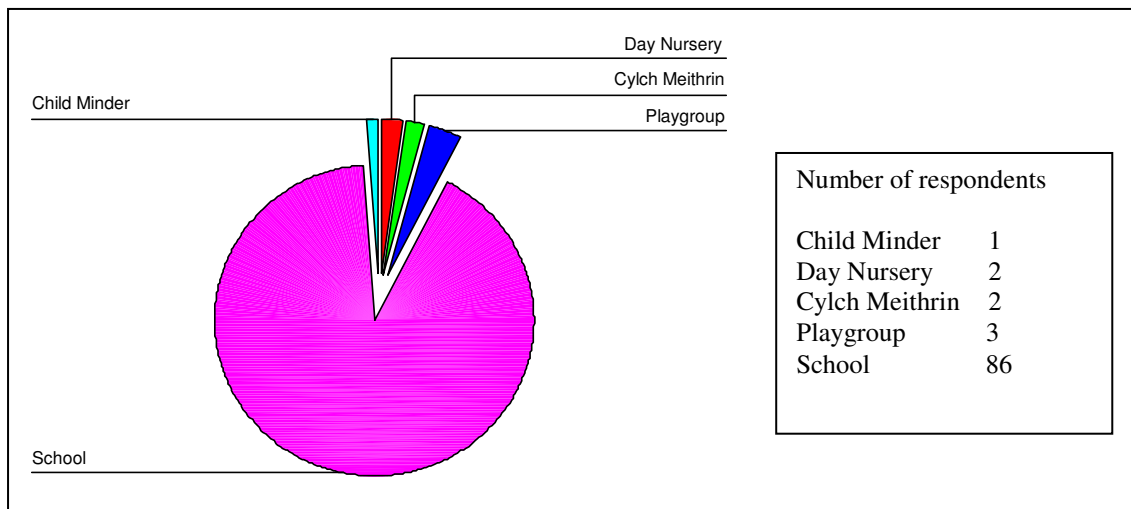
The frequency statistics relating to the settings revealed that the majority of responses were received from schools that were catering for children in the age range 3-11 years: these accounted for 53.25% of the returns, with the next largest category being infant schools with children from 3-7 years of age (20.2%). There were relatively small numbers of settings (again, in the main, these were schools) that catered for 4-11 year olds and 5-11 year olds (3.2% and 7.4% respectively) thus indicating that, in this sample at least, most children are entering school at 3 years old. 16% of the settings returning their questionnaires were catering exclusively for children under 5 years of age (3.2% with children aged 0-5 years in addition to the 12.8% with 3-5 year olds). See Table 5 below for a full account of the age ranges the settings covered.

Age range setting caters for

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-5 years	3	3.2	3.2	3.2
	3-5 years	12	12.8	12.8	16.0
	3-7 years	19	20.2	20.2	36.2
	3-11 years	50	53.2	53.2	89.4
	5-11 years	7	7.4	7.4	96.8
	4-11 years	3	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	94	100.0	100.0	

*Table 5
Age ranges settings catered for*

The large numbers of settings catering for children from 3-11 years reflects the fact that the majority of recipients of the questionnaire (185 out of 201) were schools and that the majority of respondents were also schools (86 out of 94). See Graph 2 below detailing the types of settings from which responses were received.



*Graph 2
Type of setting*

The large number of school settings and the very small number of non-maintained settings prevents any comparative analysis of their returns.

There was some confusion in two settings as to their status as pilot settings. To question 7 'Is your setting a pilot setting?', one recorded themselves as a pilot when they are not one of the 41 chosen settings and one pilot setting recorded a negative answer. The correct status was recorded in the data bank for analysis. In summary,

27 responses were received from 24 pilot settings and 67 responses were received from 51 non-pilot settings. Therefore 61.5% of the pilot settings responded (24 out of 39 sent out) compared to 31.5% of the non-pilot settings, suggesting an increased interest in the topic in those settings that are working within the Foundation Phase at this preliminary stage of the implementation. This would be an interesting area to reinvestigate over the next three and a half years as the Foundation Phase is implemented in all settings.

The age ranges respondents are working with were highly varied with many working across age ranges. This posed some issues with regard to the data to be recorded (as was previously discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.3.4), however, the most common age ranges were 4-5 years (34%) and 3-4 years (21.3 %) with 13.8% working with 3-5 year olds mixed.

The majority of groups or classes contained between 20 and 29 children (63.8%) but all group sizes were represented to some degree (see Table 6 below for the full details).

Number of children in the group/class

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-9	2	2.1	2.2	2.2
	10-19	9	9.6	9.9	12.1
	20-29	60	63.8	65.9	78.0
	30-39	10	10.6	11.0	89.0
	40+	10	10.6	11.0	100.0
	Total	91	96.8	100.0	
Missing	System	3	3.2		
Total		94	100.0		

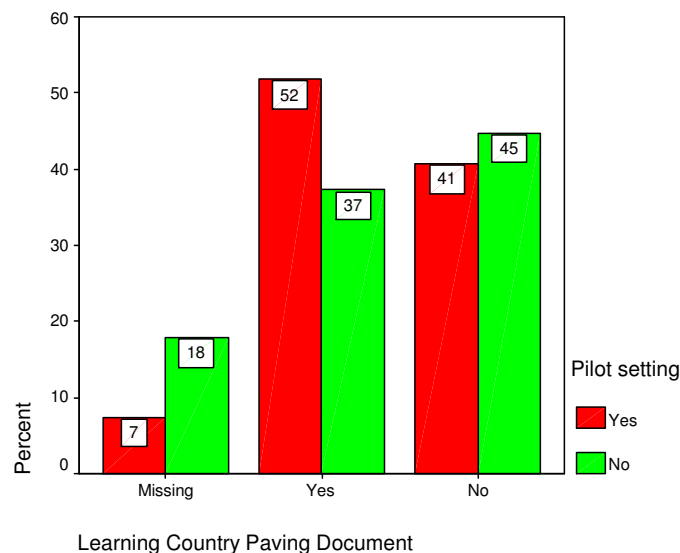
*Table 6
Number of children in respondent's class or group*

4.1.2 Part Two: Knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Phase

This section contained more nil responses than the previous section (see Appendix 5: Frequency Statistics, Part Two for the full data relating to this section).

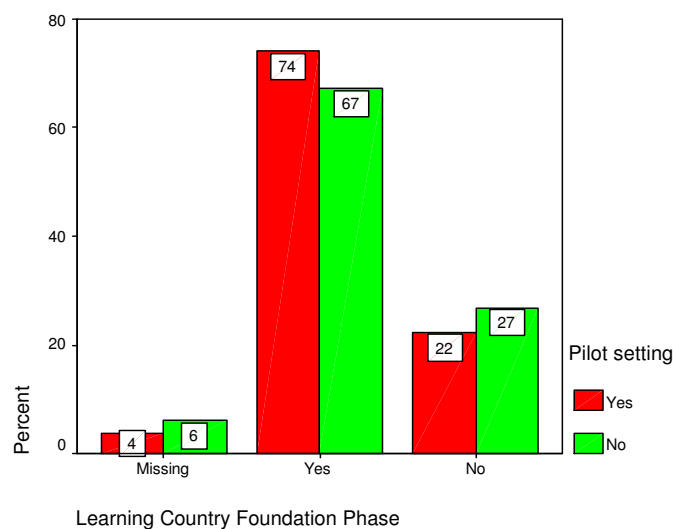
The number of respondents who recorded an answer to the question relating to reading *The Learning Country: A Paving Document* (WAG, 2001a) was almost evenly distributed between *yes* (39 responses) and *no* (41 responses). However, taking into account the nil responses, this indicates that only 41.5 % of the respondents had read this document. The response was more positive with regard to *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years* (WAG, 2003); 69.1% had read this document and there were fewer nil responses (only 5 here compared to 14 with the ‘paving’ document), perhaps indicating that the interest in reading a document increases as its relevance to an individual’s situation increases. 76.6% of respondents had read *The Foundation Phase in Wales: A Draft Framework for Children’s Learning* (ACCAC, 2004), again perhaps reflecting its relevance to practice.

Interestingly, there was some difference in the responses to Question 10 - the reading of relevant documents between the pilot and non-pilot settings. However these differences were not significant. Graph 3 below compares these percentages of pilot and non-pilot settings that had read *The Learning Country: A Paving Document* (WAG, 2001a). This table shows that, in percentage terms, nearly 3 times as many non-pilot settings gave no response to the question (18% compared to 7%) and that 52% of the pilot settings and 37% of the non-pilot settings had read the document. While the percentages are still low they are higher in the pilot settings.



*Graph 3
Comparison of pilot and non-pilot settings reading ‘The Learning Country: A Paving Document’*

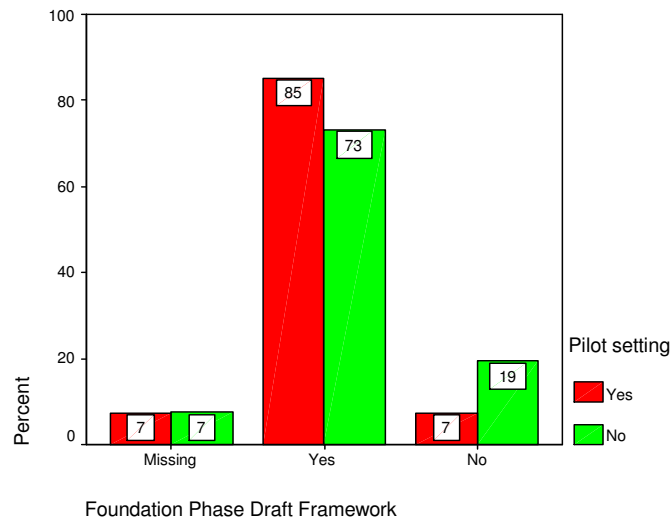
If the same analysis is repeated for *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7* (WAG, February 2003), see Graph 4 below, and *The Foundation Phase in Wales: A Draft Framework for Children’s Learning* (ACCAC, 2004), see Graph 5, the results indicate that some respondents in some settings still have not read the relevant documents. Whilst the percentage of those that have read the documents was higher in the pilot settings there was still a 22% negative response rate from pilot settings; suggesting that 22% had not read the consultation document despite implementing it. This figure only represents 6 out of the 27 responses received from pilot settings and could relate to support staff that have responded, as opposed to staff that have a greater responsibility for the implementation of the Foundation Phase. On further investigation of the data it was found that 3 of these 6 responses were from staff assumed to have a supporting role, as their qualifications are at level III (two NVQ level III in Child Care and Education and one Nursery Nurse). Two of the other three pilot respondents who had not read the document had PGCE Primary qualifications and whilst one was working with under fives the other had a class of 6-7 year olds. The final example was from a non-maintained pilot setting and the respondent had a Teacher Training Certificate from the 1960s.



*Graph 4
Comparison of pilot and non-pilot settings reading ‘The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years’*

The results relating to *The Foundation Phase in Wales – A Draft Framework for Children’s Learning* is more positive, with only 7% of the pilot setting respondents (2

people) not having read this document. This again could relate to support staff but does indicate that this document is the most read by all the settings sampled.



Graph 5

Comparison of pilot and non-pilot settings reading ‘The Foundation Phase in Wales: A Draft Framework for Children’s Learning’

The websites were less well used with 48.9% reporting visiting the learning.wales.gov.uk site and only 33% visiting the accac.org.uk/documents website. This could show a reduced need to visit these sites if hard copies of the documents had already been received. It may also suggest the nature of the individual respondent’s interest in and knowledge of information available in electronic form; however, as this was not an area tackled in this study no comment can be made here.

The number of respondents who reported that they had received a copy of the consultation document *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years* (WAG, 2003) was 67 and 2 did not respond. This indicates that 27.2% of the valid responses were negative, that is they had not received a copy of the document. This is a concern as all settings working with children under 7 years of age should have been sent a copy. If all settings did receive a copy of the documentation but over a quarter of early years’ staff in this sample have not seen it, this may indicate problems with dissemination of information within settings. See Table 7 below.

Consultation Learning Country Foundation Phase

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	67	71.3	72.8	72.8
	No	25	26.6	27.2	100.0
	Total	92	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.1		
Total		94	100.0		

Table 7

Number of respondents who received a copy of the consultation document ‘The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years’

Nearly half of all returns (45, 47.9%) reported that they had responded to the National Assembly on the consultation document (*The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years* (WAG, 2003)). This could be interpreted as a 67% response rate (45 out of the 67) from those who had received a copy. This high response rate is another indication that the sample population is highly engaged with the topic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	45	47.9	50.6	50.6
	No	44	46.8	49.4	100.0
	Total	89	94.7	100.0	
Missing	System	5	5.3		
Total		94	100.0		

Table 8

Responses to the National Assembly for Wales on the consultation document ‘The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years’

44 respondents reported that they had not responded to the National Assembly for Wales on the consultation document (see Table 8) but only 25 of these gave a reason for their lack of response. The most common reason given was that another member of staff had been given the opportunity (36%), 32% said that lack of time was the reason and 20% preferred teaching to form filling.

4.1.3 Part Three: Attitudes and feelings towards the Foundation Phase

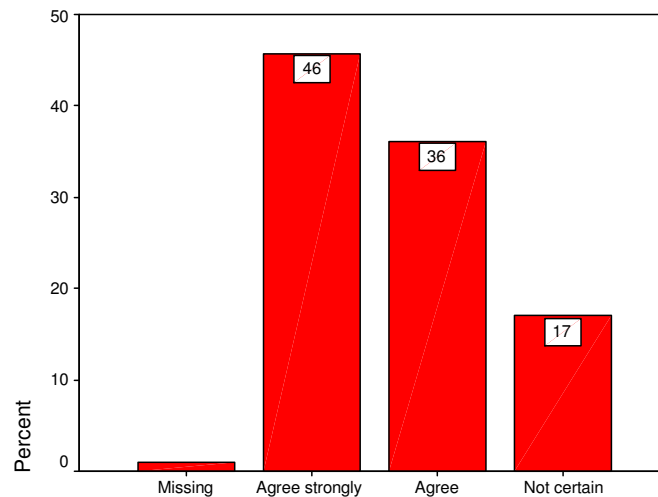
The third section of the questionnaire related to the attitudes and feelings the respondents had towards the Foundation Phase, its implications for children and issues of implementation. This was approached by using some of the statements given by the staff of the school used in the case study and organising these and the

additional statements chosen into sections that dealt with particular aspects of the Foundation Phase (information is given on this process in 3.2.1 and 3.2.3 Methodology).

There are three sub-sections within Part Three of the questionnaire: Question 13, *How do you feel about the Foundation Phase?* which contains 8 statements; Question 14, *What are the implications for the children in your care?* which has 6 statements; and Question 15, *Key Issues*, with 9 statements. The respondent was invited to read each statement then rate their agreement with that statement on a five point scale, from 'agree strongly' through to 'disagree strongly'. They were encouraged to answer as honestly as possible. (See Appendix 3 for a copy of the questionnaire).

4.1.4 Part Three: Question 13 How do you feel about the Foundation Phase?

The first 8 statements were designed to explore the range of feelings the early years staff towards the Foundation Phase and its implementation. The first was *I feel excited about the Foundation Phase*. There were no negative responses to this statement. Graph 6, below shows that 82% agreed or agreed strongly with the statement and only 17% were uncertain.



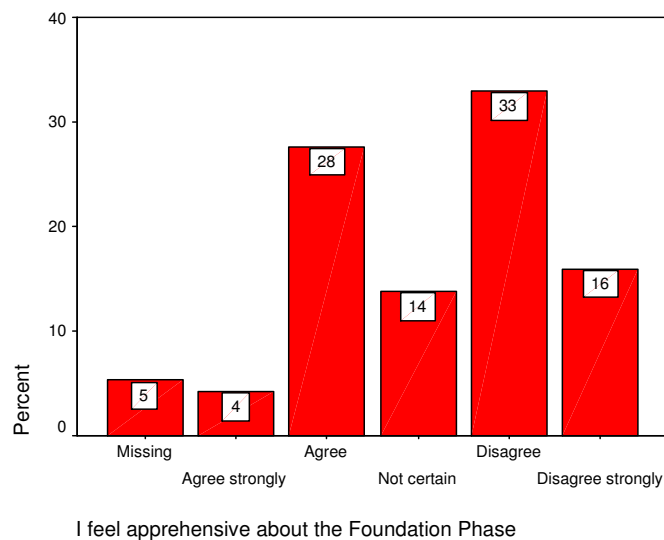
I feel excited about the Foundation Phase

Graph 6
Excitement about the Foundation Phase

Interestingly, if pilot and non-pilot settings are compared in their response to this statement, both types of settings had a similar percentage agreeing strongly but 48%

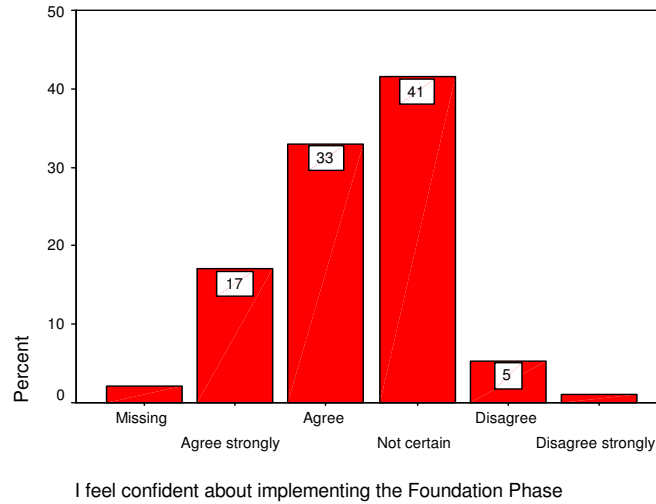
of the pilot settings and 31% of the non-pilot settings agreed. Three times the percentage of non-pilot compared to pilot settings were unsure (21% to 7%). This indicates that the level of excitement felt in anticipation of the arrival of the Foundation Phase initiative continues in the post-implementation period. (See Appendix 6 for a full set of graphs comparing pilot and non pilot settings for Part Three of the questionnaire. The graphs in the first section of this appendix relate to those shown in this section 4.1.4 and carry the suffix 'a' for ease of comparison).

The response to the second statement however was much more evenly spread (see Graph 7). 32% of the sample were '*apprehensive about the Foundation Phase*' while 49% were not, indicating that respondents may feel both excited and apprehensive at the same time. 15% of the pilot settings failed to respond to this question: perhaps they no longer feel apprehension as for them the Foundation Phase is now a reality. However, and in contradiction to this, a comparison of the two types of settings shows that there is more apprehension in pilot than in non-pilot settings (Graph 7a, Appendix 6).



Graph 7
Apprehension about the Foundation Phase

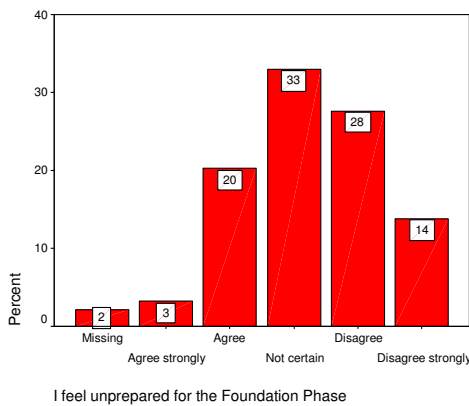
The levels of confidence regarding the implementation of the Foundation Phase were also high as is demonstrated in Graph 8.



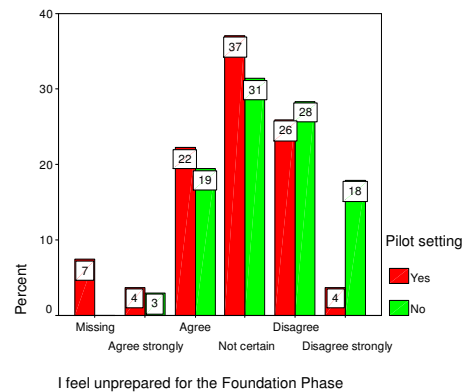
Graph 8
Confidence regarding the implementation of the Foundation Phase

50% of the sample was confident about implementing the Foundation Phase but a high percentage (41%) was uncertain about their level of confidence. Only 6% were unconfident. Over half (56%) of the pilot settings were uncertain of their confidence (See Graph 8a in Appendix 6 for an illustration of this data).

This feeling of apprehension and uncertainty combined with the figures relating to the level of preparedness for the Foundation Phase suggest that those settings already involved in the implementation need more support.



Graph 9

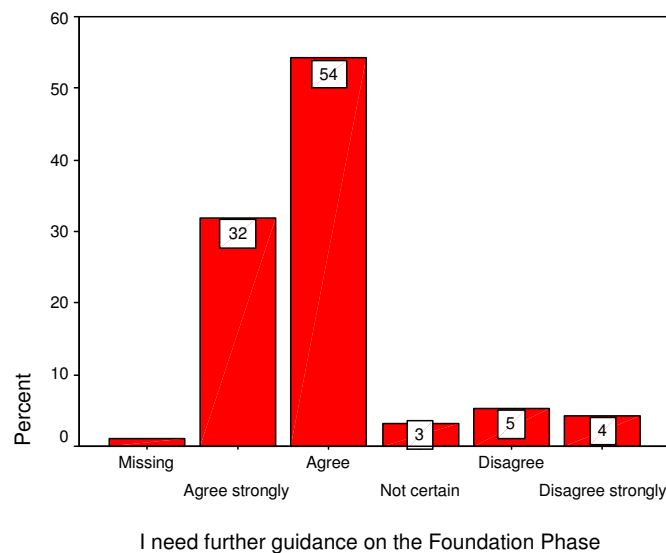


Graph 9a

Graph 9 and 9a confirm this feeling of vulnerability among the pilot settings. The more positive responses from the non-pilot settings could indicate a feeling of complacency as there is no need for them to be prepared at this stage, or it could

reflect a genuine feeling of confidence regarding the development of this initiative. One pilot setting teacher did comment that because she was in this position of *'piloting the FP these questions can now be far more positive'* (Appendix 4)

Nearly all settings felt there was a need for further guidance on the implementation of the Foundation Phase, as is demonstrated in graph 10. 86% of the sample expressed agreement with the statement, 32% of them strongly. There was very little difference here when the pilot and non-pilot settings were compared (89% of pilot and 85% of non-pilot settings agreeing). This again demonstrates the need for more support than was being offered at the time of the study.



*Graph 10
The need for further guidance on the implementation of the Foundation Phase*

Written comments received also backed up the need for more guidance and support:

'I feel we have not received enough guidance about the foundation phase and all aspects of it.....We have received no formal information and even county advisors say they don't know anything yet'

'Documentation/advice and training have been slow in materialising'.

(Appendix 4)

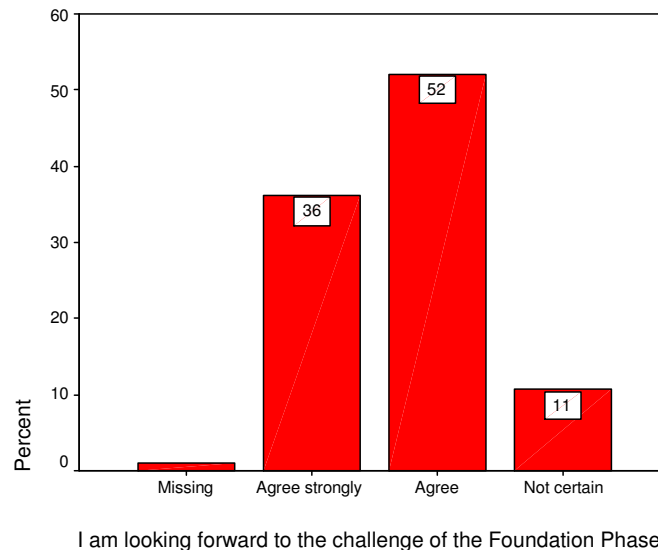
This feeling of lack of support was not universal; two respondents praised their Local Education Authorities for their part in this process:

The Local Education Authority have been very supportive – training on outdoor play/child development/ Language/play/ bilingualism and others.

Caerphilly borough are doing an excellent job of all of these.
[Refers to in-service training].

(Appendix 4)

The majority of the sample group (88%) were looking forward to the challenge of the Foundation Phase and this was even higher in the pilot schools (97% in pilot and 85% in non-pilot settings). This could be interpreted as a positive endorsement of the initiative and indicates that those that returned the questionnaire are looking to the future optimistically.



Graph 11
Looking forward to the challenge of the Foundation Phase

One respondent summed up her feelings by saying:

'This is an exciting time in Early Years Education. I am looking forward to the challenge and feel we are taking a step in the right direction.'

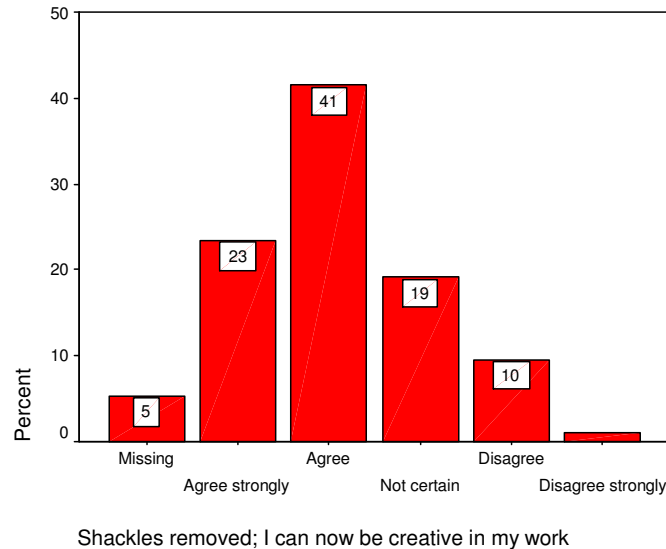
(Appendix 4)

Statement 13g *'The shackles have been removed; I can now be creative in my work with young children'* had the most nil responses in this section (along with statement 13b relating to apprehension). There was also a much more mixed response here with all categories being represented but again the majority appeared to feel that this was a

forward step and agreed that the new curriculum would increase creativity in their work. One respondent commented here:

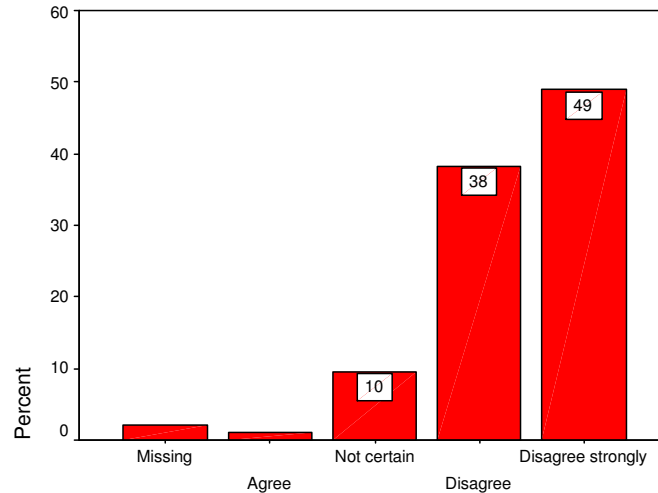
'What it needs is creative thinking and highly arranged and detailed planning for all adults involved. It needs to be play, interesting but moreover make a difference to Children's Learning.'

(Appendix 4)



*Graph 12
Creativity and freedom in work with young children*

The positive endorsement of the Foundation Phase by the sample group is very clearly shown in the response to the final statement in this section (see Graph 13 below). 87% responded in the negative to *'The Foundation Phase is a backward step'* with nearly fifty percent strongly disagreeing.



The Foundation Phase is a backward step

Graph 13
The Foundation Phase is a backward step

4.1.5 Part Three: Question 14 The implications for children

There were very few nil responses to this section of the questionnaire and again the results are generally positive towards the changes the Foundation Phase will initiate. There were also fewer differences between pilot and non-pilot settings' responses in this section (for graphic explanation of these see Appendix 6, Question 14).

There was no disagreement with the initial statement in this section '*The Foundation Phase is an opportunity for the children to be actively involved in their own learning*' and only 5 respondents were uncertain. Nearly 95% (94.6%) that responded agreed. This supports what is seen to be good early years practice and is stated in *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7* (WAG, 2003)

Good early learning does not depend exclusively on the use of one particular curriculum model. However, there is evidence that a curriculum in which children are involved in planning and reviewing their work, and that offers a broad range of experiences, has a positive long-term effect on their social and intellectual development. This is particularly so for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

(WAG, 2003: 13-14)

More than 80% of the 92 settings that responded agreed to the statement '*It gives children the opportunity to organise their own time and make choices*' and only just

over 4% disagreed. This could indicate that staff, in these settings at least, are willing to give children more responsibility and autonomy in their learning. There were one or two words of warning given in the written comments regarding children being given responsibility and choice:

‘Choice can be built in and needs careful structuring. If it is about “let it all hang out and following the whim of a child” it will FAIL.’

*‘Gall cael gormod o ddewis fod yn rwystr i blant gan y gallant wrthod cydymffurfio mewn achosion eraill. Mae angen iddynt ddysgu fod y rhiad gwneud rhaw pethau mewn bywyd nad dynt yn ei hoffi.’
[‘Too much choice can be a barrier to children as they can refuse to conform in other areas. They have to learn that they must do certain things in life that they do not want’].*

(Appendix 4)

These comments, however, do not seem to reflect the general feelings of respondents as shown by the numerical data collected.

The issues of routine, classroom management and the adult’s role would be interesting topics for further study especially as some of these were areas highlighted as needs by the respondents in the section devoted to in-service training (Part: Four, Question 17).

The needs and interests of individual children were considered next and again over 80% agreed that the Foundation Phase *‘is an opportunity for individual children to follow their specific interests and needs’*. Providing a curriculum appropriate to individual children is seen as good practice and is highlighted in the Foundation Phase consultative document under the section on why change is needed.

Children need time to play, to reflect, to repeat, and talk to peers and adults. A curriculum for young children should be appropriate to their stage of learning rather than focusing solely on outcomes to be achieved. Young children need many more opportunities to learn through finding out about things that are of interest to them rather than focussing solely on what is determined by others. The curriculum must therefore, be flexible enough to allow for individual differences.

(WAG, 2003: 8-9)

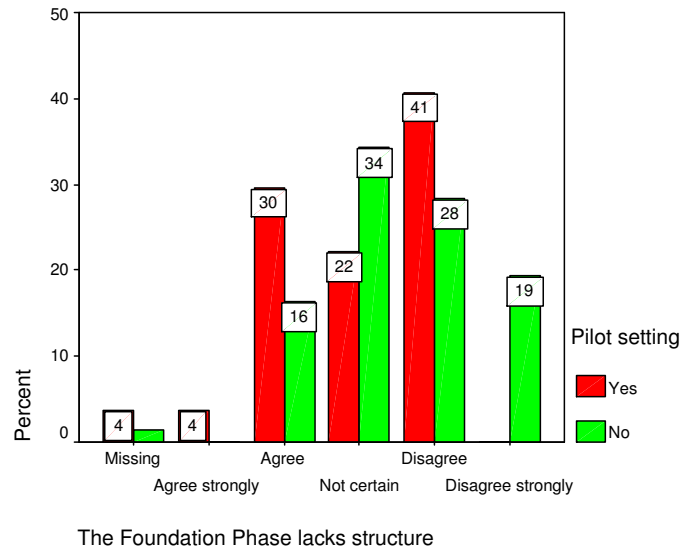
The Foundation Phase lacks structure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree strongly	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	Agree	19	20.2	20.7	21.7
	Not certain	29	30.9	31.5	53.3
	Disagree	30	31.9	32.6	85.9
	Disagree strongly	13	13.8	14.1	100.0
	Total	92	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.1		
Total		94	100.0		

Table 9

Responses to the statement 'The Foundation Phase lacks structure'

The fourth statement in this section, '*The Foundation Phase lacks structure*', gave the widest range of answers as shown in the table above. 21.3% agreed with the statement, however only 1.1% strongly agreed. 45.7% disagreed (13.8% strongly) and a large proportion (30.9%) were uncertain. It might be expected that this high level of uncertainty was being expressed by staff in those settings not yet working with the new curriculum but if the pilot and non-pilot settings are compared (see Graph 14 below) it reveals that there are still 22% of the respondents from pilot settings that are uncertain whether the Foundation Phase lacks structure. Also, nearly one third of the respondents from pilot settings felt the Foundation Phase did lack structure. Indeed, one pilot setting wrote that '*The Foundation Phase lacks structure in its draft form.*' (Appendix 4). 41% of pilot setting respondents disagreed that the Foundation Phase lacks structure but the only respondents to strongly disagree were those from non-pilot settings.



Graph 14
Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings on the perception of lack of structure in the Foundation Phase

With reference to the successes of the current system (statement 14e) it was realised that the respondents, depending on their current situation, could be referring to either *The Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning before Compulsory School Age* (ACCAC 2000) or *The National Curriculum* (NAW, 2000) or indeed to the present curricula as a complete system. For this reason the results as a whole for this statement (see Table 10 below) were revisited and the age ranges of groups and classes were reclassified into three groups; those groups with children younger than compulsory school age (in this case 5 years of age, as specific ages were not available), those with children 5 years or older and the third group consisted of classes and groups that spanned this divide. This recoding resulted in 72 settings with children exclusively under 5 years of age (labelled Desirable Outcomes), 14 mixed curricula settings and 5 settings with children exclusively over 5 years of age (labelled National Curriculum).⁸

⁸ If the frequency statistics for this manipulation are studied (Appendix 5: page 38-39) it will be noted that there is now 1 additional missing return which relates to a setting catering for 0-7 year olds that could not be recoded.

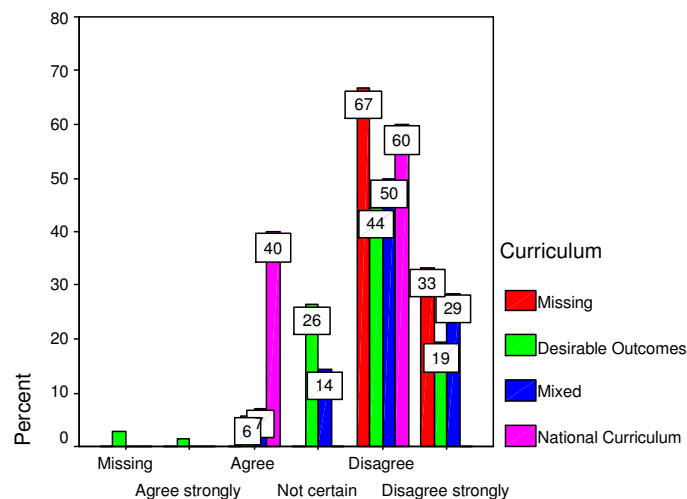
The current system works well; it does not need to be changed

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree strongly	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	Agree	7	7.4	7.6	8.7
	Not certain	21	22.3	22.8	31.5
	Disagree	44	46.8	47.8	79.3
	Disagree strongly	19	20.2	20.7	100.0
	Total	92	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.1		
Total		94	100.0		

Table 10

Responses to the statement ‘The current system works well; it does not need to be changed’

When the views of the respondents grouped by current curriculum are analysed (see graph 15 below) the one response that stands out is the number of National Curriculum settings that do not wish to see change (40%); however, as there were only 5 of these settings in the sample this only relates to two settings. It could therefore be concluded from these statistics that, within the sample group, there is a relatively strong movement for change. Interestingly there was almost no difference in responses here between pilot and non pilot settings (see Appendix 6: page 8, Graph 15a).



The current system works well; it does not need to be changed

Graph 15

Comparison of responses to the statement ‘The current system works well; it does not need to be changed’, based on present curriculum used

The final statement in this section was *'The Foundation Phase encourages building children's self esteem and confidence'*. This was included here because, as stated in the Foundation Phase document:

Personal and social development and well-being should become a core area of the Foundation Phase that can be developed through all other areas of learning. (WAG, 2003: 14)

The importance of this area and its relevance to young children's learning appears to have been understood by the respondents in this sample. Although this was not directly asked some written comments received provide support for this argument:

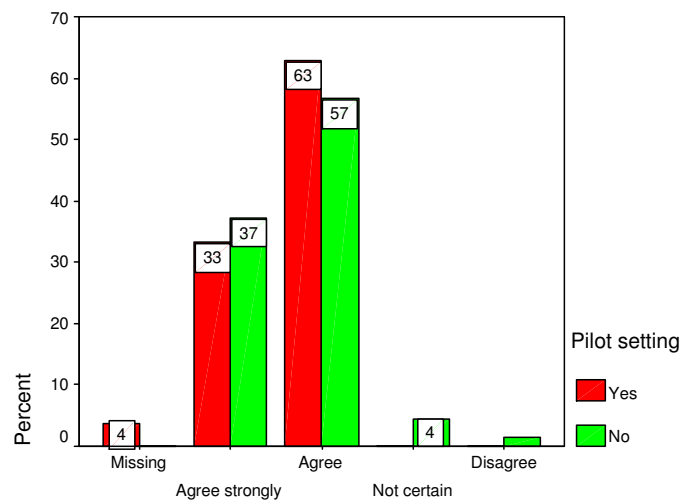
'Certainly there is need for a move away from the very formal teaching and early high expectations, but I'm not sure the FP is completely realistic in its place.'

'After visiting schools in Denmark and hearing about Italian early years education – I feel that we push our children into an academic situation at far too early an age.'

Children need to be encouraged gently into learning – they will (mostly) learn when they are ready. This is far less stressful for them and will stop them from being anti-learning in K/Stages 2 and beyond.'

(Appendix 4)

The graph below demonstrates very clearly the positive response given to this statement about children's self esteem and confidence with 96% of pilot settings and 94% of non-pilot settings agreeing.



The FP encourages building children's self esteem and confidence

Graph 16

Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings: The Foundation Phase encourages building children's self-esteem and confidence

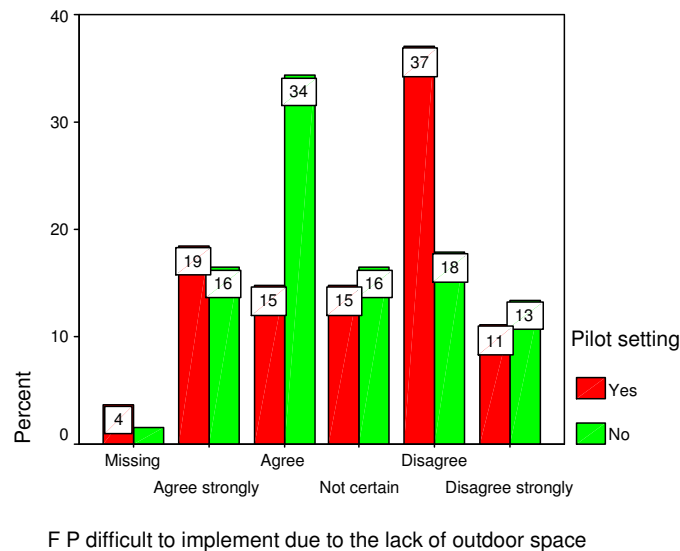
4.1.6 Part Three: Question 15 Key Issues

The frequency statistics for this section of the questionnaire show a wider range of responses than in some other sections, perhaps indicating the unique needs of particular settings and individuals within those settings. The statements that did show more consistency in responses were those relating to the financial commitment, parental awareness, support of Key Stage 2 staff and training issues.

The full range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree were given to the initial statement in this section, *The Foundation Phase will be difficult to implement due to lack of outdoor space*. See Graph 17 below for a summary of this. This range of answers may relate to individual settings' needs and sites and their solutions to issues of space. As one respondent remarked, this could provide a real opportunity to bring the school community together on a project:

'We have had great success with parents – built a play area – outside classroom'.

(Appendix 4)



Graph 17

Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings: The Foundation Phase will be difficult to implement due to lack of outdoor space

Interestingly the comparison of pilot and non-pilot settings on this statement reveals one marked difference in response – the non-pilot settings viewed this as more of a problem than the pilot settings. This could indicate that more of the pilot settings had appropriate outdoor space prior to the implementation or any problems encountered or foreseen have been, at least in 48% of cases, solved or found to be unsubstantiated.

The Foundation Phase will be difficult to implement due to the lack of outdoor space

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree strongly	16	17.0	17.4	17.4
	Agree	27	28.7	29.3	46.7
	Not certain	15	16.0	16.3	63.0
	Disagree	22	23.4	23.9	87.0
	Disagree strongly	12	12.8	13.0	100.0
	Total	92	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.1		
Total		94	100.0		

Table 11

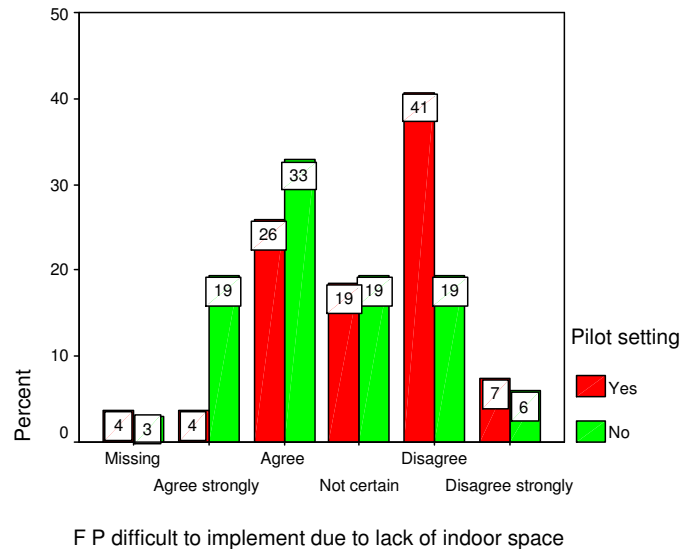
The results regarding the issue of lack of indoor space were very similar to those for outdoor space (see tables 11 above and 12 below).

The Foundation Phase will be difficult to implement due to the lack of indoor space

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree strongly	14	14.9	15.4	15.4
	Agree	29	30.9	31.9	47.3
	Not certain	18	19.1	19.8	67.0
	Disagree	24	25.5	26.4	93.4
	Disagree strongly	6	6.4	6.6	100.0
	Total	91	96.8	100.0	
Missing	System	3	3.2		
Total		94	100.0		

Table 12

Also, when the two types of setting are compared the results display a similar pattern in the responses to the lack of indoor space as for outdoor space and again the pilot settings perceived this as less of a problem than the non-pilot settings. However, in answer to both questions there were still over 30 % who agreed that the Foundation Phase would be difficult to implement because of space issues.



Graph 18

Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings: The Foundation Phase will be difficult to implement due to lack of indoor space

The issue of staffing, both in terms of funding and finding appropriately qualified and/or experienced staff to meet the required ratios suggested in *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years* (WAG, 2003: 24), was clearly an issue for many respondents. The document states that:

Good ratios of appropriately trained adults to children are essential if children are to experience effective early years activities.

(WAG, 2003: 23)

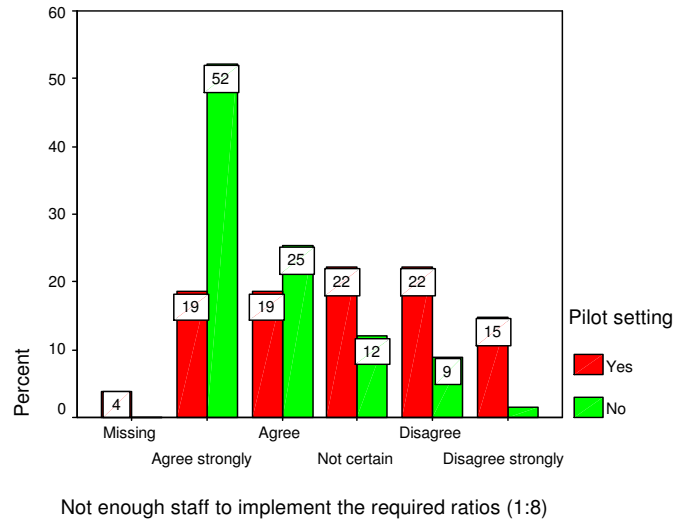
It suggests that to ensure parity and consistency across settings the ratios should be:

not less than the standards set by the Care standards Inspectorate for Wales; that is; one adult to eight children.

(WAG, 2003: 23)

However the document is a little tentative here and does suggest that the position taken on staffing should be subject to further examination and consideration during the piloting of the Foundation Phase.

The responses received on the questionnaire demonstrated that this was an area of concern, particularly from the non-pilot settings. Over 50% of these respondents strongly agreed that *'There are not enough staff to implement the required ratios (1:8 by 2008, 1:13 by 2006)'*. The responses from the pilot settings were much more evenly spread (see Graph 19 below).



Graph 19

Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings regarding the lack of staff to implement the required ratios

A large number of respondents expressed their concern over the question of staffing in their additional written responses:

‘On a personal level I believe the Foundation Phase to be a very positive step for EY education. I worry however, that the funding will not arrive from the Welsh Assembly to pay for the additional adults needed to really ensure that the FP gets off to a good start.’

‘Children can only learn so much on their own and without intervention by adults at the critical time, then this way of learning will not work. High ratio of adults needed therefore. We have this in Playgroup but I’m not sure it will work in schools.’

‘Let’s hope that the money will become available in order that there will be enough staff to make this work. There is no substitute for small group education.’

‘This is an exciting time in Early Years Education. I am looking forward to the challenge and feel we are taking a step in the right direction. One concern is the question of staffing.’

‘I am now in the fortunate position of having 1:8 – I cannot imagine being without my help any more – this ratio is vital in a mixed aged early years classroom.’

(Appendix 4)

These very clearly demonstrate the strength of feeling on this issue that is only surpassed, in this sample at least, by the worries over funding in general. (See Table 13)

Resources were also an area where the majority of respondents felt there was insufficiency (55.3%) but there was a relatively large proportion here that was either unsure (20.2%) or felt this was not an issue (23.4%). (See Appendix 5: Frequency Statistics for the relevant statistics and Appendix 6: Question 15 Key Issues, for a graphical representation and comparison of pilot and non-pilot settings).

The response to the statement ‘The Welsh Assembly Government must make a financial commitment to support the initiative’ displayed the most accord. Nearly 95% (94.7) of the respondents agreed with this statement and only one respondent (1.1%) disagreed. Two respondents were unsure. Interestingly the one person that disagreed was a representative of a pilot setting. See Table 13 below.

The Welsh Assembly Government must make a financial commitment to support the initiative

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree strongly	72	76.6	78.3	78.3
	Agree	17	18.1	18.5	96.7
	Not certain	2	2.1	2.2	98.9
	Disagree	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	92	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.1		
Total		94	100.0		

Table 13

This, as already inferred, was another area where respondents felt the need to write additional comments:

*‘Rwy’n bryderus iawn na fydd digon o arian ar gael i Weithredu’r Cyfnod Sylfaen ac i wneud yn un llwyddianus.’
[‘I’m very concerned that there will be insufficient funding to implement the Foundation Phase and to make it successful.’]*

‘My biggest worry is will the funding continue as the Foundation Phase rolls into Y’s 1 and 2 and extends from pilots to all schools. This is a huge commitment – the whole thing will fail if not adequately funded.’

(Appendix 4)

There was very little disagreement with the statement ‘Ways must be found to raise parental awareness of the new curriculum’. Only two respondents disagreed and neither of these strongly disagreed. *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7*

(WAG, 2003) states the need to inform and reassure stakeholders, and the importance of ensuring that this information is in an accessible format for all those who have an interest.

Parents, schools, settings and the public will need reassurance that the proposed changes will help to improve the quality of provision for young children. Subject to the results of this consultation information will need to be provided about changes finally approved, in different forms – including briefings, leaflets, videos and web-based materials.

(WAG, 2003: 18)

The school used in the case study for this project informed parents of its status as a pilot school in the Summer Term of 2004. This was done at a public meeting where all parents and interested parties were invited to hear Siân Richards and Sue Davies (expert advisors to the Welsh Assembly Government) explain the implications of being a pilot setting and the ethos and thinking behind the new Foundation Phase curriculum. According to the headteacher, this meeting was well attended and while parents expressed concerns about maintaining standards in ‘reading and literacy’ there was no opposition to the scheme in principle. Since the initiation of the pilot in September 2004 there has been one parents’ evening where individual parents met with their child’s teacher (January 2005). The teachers explained the new curriculum and routine to the individual parents and no parent raised any concerns. In February 2005 the Welsh Assembly Government sent out a new consultation document *Implementation of the Foundation Phase Pilot: Removal of the requirements to teach the National Curriculum at Key Stage 1 in Pilot schools* (WAG, 2005) to each parent with a child who will be in year 1 or 2 of pilot settings in September 2005. (See Appendix 8 for a copy of the agreement form and covering letter from the school used in the case study). The majority of these agreement forms have been returned to the headteacher and to date all responses have been positive. However, the headteacher did imply that this indication of satisfaction with the Foundation Phase may have more to do with the current adult:child ratio of 1:8 rather than any consideration of the principles of the new curriculum.

The proposed Foundation Phase would mean radical changes to the education of young children under seven years of age in Wales, and parents and other interested parties must understand and support this movement if it is to succeed. As one respondent wrote:

'The parents need to be informed as well as KS1 and 2 teachers in order to know what to expect.'

(Appendix 4)

The above comment also implies that not only those outside the system need to be informed and, ultimately, understand and support the new ideas and ethos of the Foundation Phase curriculum, but also other staff. Staff that are both directly (Key Stage 1 staff) and indirectly (Key Stage 2) need to receive training and guidance. Tables 14 and 15 below clearly demonstrate the feelings of this sample group to the two related issues of support and understanding of Key Stage 2 staff, and of the training of all staff.

The support and understanding of Key Stage 2 staff is essential in order to ensure the success of the Foundation Phase

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree strongly	57	60.6	62.0	62.0
	Agree	31	33.0	33.7	95.7
	Not certain	3	3.2	3.3	98.9
	Disagree	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	92	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.1		
Total		94	100.0		

Table 14

This dissemination of information is significant because as one respondent emphasised:

'The Foundation Phase is more than Early Years!!'

(Appendix 4)

Training of all staff concerned will be necessary

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree strongly	64	68.1	69.6	69.6
	Agree	26	27.7	28.3	97.8
	Not certain	2	2.1	2.2	100.0
	Total	92	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.1		
Total		94	100.0		

Table 15

It is also important to reassure those teachers and support staff in Key Stage 2 that the introduction of the Foundation Phase will not automatically mean a drop in standards. On the contrary, one of the aims of the new curriculum is that children who have experienced the Foundation Phase should have improved oral language skills, increased self esteem, a disposition to learning and the ability to manage their own learning. (WAG, 2003: 13-15)

The ethos of the new Foundation Phase curriculum needs to be understood in order to counteract the downward pressure to begin formal education earlier and earlier. This is another area of concern for the respondents to the questionnaire:

'Already practise most of what Foundation Phase is advocating in our Playgroup – Learning through Play. Has become more formal over years to meet expectations from school. We will still have to keep a balance so that we still fulfil what is expected from us from school (not on pilot scheme).'

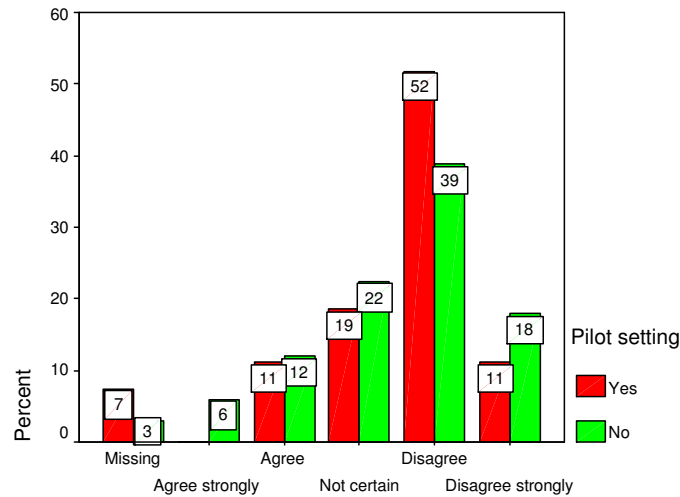
'After visiting schools in Denmark and hearing about Italian early years education – I feel that we push our children into an academic situation at far too early an age. Children need to be encouraged gently into learning – they will (mostly) learn when they are ready. This is far less stressful for them and will stop them from being anti-learning in K/Stages 2 and beyond.'

'I feel that the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning has been an inspirational document for Early Years. However, something is needed to get Early Years and KS1 together and I think that the Foundation Phase is just the thing. I feel strongly that KS1 teachers need help and support in implementing this.'

(Appendix 4)

The staff in education and care settings have undoubtedly received many documents and had to implement numerous changes in the last decade. These changes may have been required by national legislation or been edicts from governing bodies and/or associated organisations. For this reason the statement *'This is just another change: we have had too many changes in recent years'* was included in the questionnaire. The responses were relatively positive for the Foundation Phase; nearly 60% of the respondents disagreed with the statement and only 16% agreed. However, this cannot be interpreted as an endorsement of the proposed curriculum as many of the sample

group that responded may well have done so because they are positively inclined towards the Foundation Phase initiative. With reference to the pilot settings though, this can be said to be more representative as 61.5% of the 39 settings canvassed returned at least one questionnaire. Graph 20 below demonstrates the support for the initiative despite the many changes over recent years.



This is just another change; too many changes in recent years

*Graph 20
Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings regarding the view that 'this is just another change'*

4.1.7 Part Four: Training needs

The final section of the questionnaire deals with training needs. This was included in the study as the responses given here may highlight areas of either universal or particular concern. Also, as the study is being carried out within an institute of Higher Education, it may be used to inform programme developers and aid in the planning and implementation of appropriate training in the future.

4.1.8 Part Four: Support

There were very few negative responses (less than 5% in total) to any of the statements in question 16 relating to the support that settings would find useful. In all cases over 70% of the respondents felt that support would be useful. The three most popular types of support were in-service training days in the setting itself, visits to other settings and network support groups in their local area, all of which had 90.4% of the respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that this type of support would be useful. *Visits to other settings, centres of excellence*, was strongly supported by over

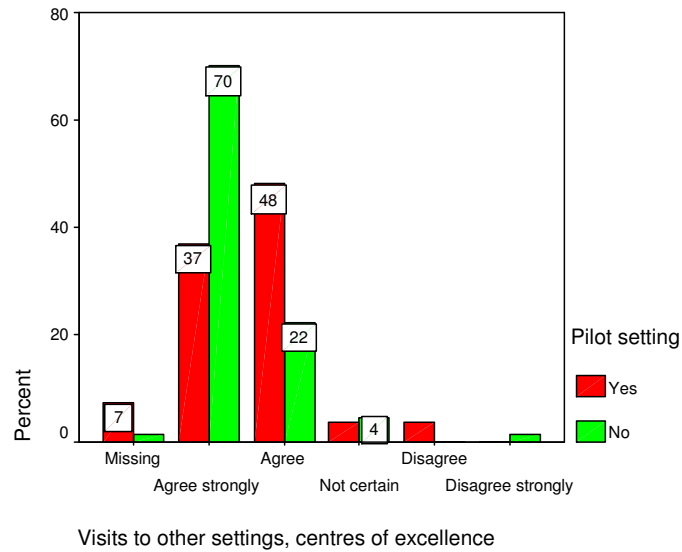
60% of the respondents and only 2 respondents felt this was not a useful option. The least popular option was having mentors available to the setting with only 21.3% agreeing strongly and 48.9% agreeing; however even here, only 6 respondents actually thought this would not be useful (see Table 16 below). These figures indicate that, within this sample group, support of any sort would be welcomed. For a full analysis of the results in this section please refer to the frequency statistics in Appendix 5: pages 27 to 30.

Mentors available to the setting

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree strongly	20	21.3	22.7	22.7
	Agree	46	48.9	52.3	75.0
	Not certain	16	17.0	18.2	93.2
	Disagree	5	5.3	5.7	98.9
	Disagree strongly	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	88	93.6	100.0	
Missing	System	6	6.4		
	Total	94	100.0		

Table 16

When comparisons are made between pilot and non-pilot settings in this section very little difference can be seen in the answers except within the levels of agreement. Here the most significant difference related to the desire to *visit other settings, centres of excellence*. Only 37% of pilot settings compared to 70% of non-pilot settings agreed strongly that this would be useful (see Graph 21 below). This could be interpreted as a concern that it would be their setting that would be visited due to their piloting of the curriculum. This was certainly a fear expressed by some of the staff at the case study school who felt it was important that they were allowed to experiment and develop the new curriculum without the added ‘pressure’ of visitors. This figure could also be interpreted more positively as a lesser need for such visits due to their experience within the pilot phase.



Graph 21
Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings regarding the desire to visit other settings, centres of excellence

Another interesting and perhaps significant finding is that in every case more pilot schools failed to give an answer to the statement. This could indicate a lesser need for support, more uncertainty regarding the type of support that would be useful or a feeling that this section did not relate to their position as they were already involved in the implementation of the Foundation Phase. (For a full set of graphs relating to Question 16: Support see Appendix 6, Part Four).

4.1.9 Part Four: Topics for training

In relation to the topic areas for which training was felt to be required (Question 17), all the titles suggested in the questionnaire were seen to be of importance by the majority of the respondents. It would have been useful to have had an additional section here inviting the recipients of the questionnaire to detail areas where they felt a need for additional training. The data collected, therefore, is insufficient to draw conclusions about the topics that practitioners wish to receive training on and in what numbers.

The data does indicate that the most strongly desired training was on *Outdoor Play*. Nearly half of respondents (47.9%) said that they strongly agreed that in-service training needs to be provided on this subject, a further 37.2% agreed. This response

reflects the emphasis that is placed on outdoor play in the Foundation Phase consultative document. The document states that currently outdoor play:

is not a strong feature of early years provision in Wales and is even less evident in Key Stage 1.

(WAG, 2003: 17)

It promotes the outdoor environment as an important space for learning (particularly experiential learning) and suggests placing a greater emphasis on learning outside.

The document suggests that models of good practice seen in other countries, such as Denmark, Italy and New Zealand, could be incorporated here through the implementation of the new curriculum. In these countries there appears to be a greater emphasis on children's autonomy in learning and links are made between well-being and learning. The need for training on *allowing children choice* was agreed with by 83% of the respondents. Training on *time management – children* was agreed with to some degree by over 86% of the respondents. However, one respondent (whose data is not included in the sample - as it was received 1 month after the deadline) did not believe that young children were capable of taking this responsibility. She stated that:

'I don't believe the children at 5 yrs old are able to organize their own time – they make choices unaware of time constraints.'

(Appendix 4)

The need for training on *observation and assessment* would be welcomed by over 87% of the sample group with 45.7% agreeing strongly to the need for this training. This again reflects the emphasis placed on observation as a tool for assessment in the consultative document. The ethos of the Foundation Phase promotes the development and well-being of the individual child and the significance of observation as part of the planning process. Observation informs planning and also provides a means of assessment. This, linked with a knowledge of child development (on which topic 80.8% of the respondents agreed training was needed), is seen in the consultative document as important in enabling practitioners to provide appropriate learning environments (WAG, 2003: 21-23).

This return to ‘child centred education’ was cautiously welcomed by one respondent who said that:

‘My training took place when Child Development was the key to the way we taught. Also ‘The Plowden Report’ was “our bible”.’

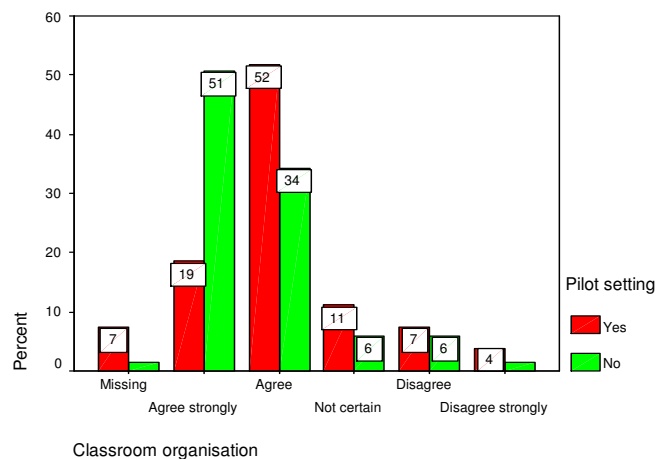
However she did temper this with the comment:

‘Certainly there is a need for a move away from the very formal teaching and early high expectations, but I am not sure the FP is completely realistic in its place.’

(Appendix 4)

The responses to Question 17f (*observation and assessment*) and 17g (*child development*) were analysed with reference to the respondent’s qualifications, as the content of their training may influence the requirement for additional contribution on the topic. There was no obvious difference in the responses (to either statement) from practitioners with different qualifications. The date their most appropriate qualification was obtained was also considered but this, too, did not appear to have influenced the result in any significant manner.

When comparisons are made between pilot and non-pilot settings in their responses to the topics for training very little difference is seen (see Appendix 6, Question 17). In the main, the pilot settings feel the need for training less strongly and the most significant difference was in the need for training on classroom organisation where only 19% of pilot settings compared to 51% of non-pilot settings strongly agreed. See Graph 22 below.

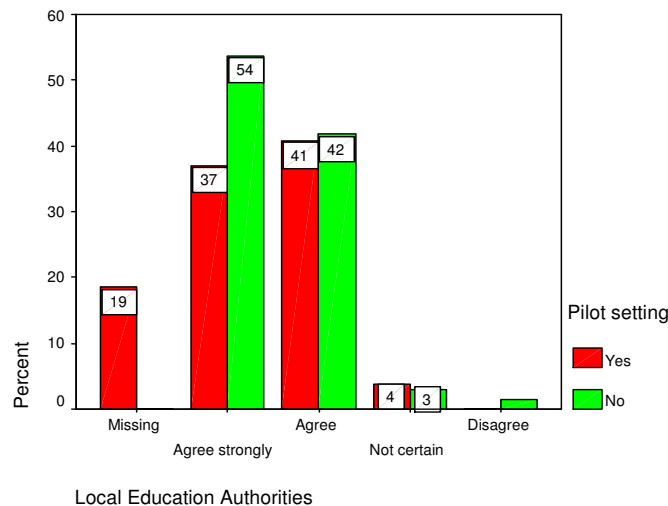


Graph 22

Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings regarding the desire to have training on classroom organisation

4.1.10 Part Four: Providers

The responses to this section showed very little difference between pilot and non-pilot settings and the most popular provider was the Local Education Authority (LEA), see Graph 23 below. This result was to be expected as 91.5% of respondents were from schools and the majority of their staff development occurs through the LEA. This could also be interpreted as an endorsement of the relationship between these schools and their LEA.



Graph 23

Comparison between pilot and non-pilot settings:

In-service training should be provided by Local Education Authorities

The least popular training providers were institutes of higher education (HE) and staff within their own settings. Both these potential providers received a proportion of negative responses. 16 respondents disagreed (at some level) with HE institutions providing training and 13 disagreed with members of their own staff delivering training. Comments were also received on the subject of students and their preparedness for the Foundation Phase:

‘HE institutions need to ensure students are prepared. At present students seem to know little of this.’

‘In-service training should be provided to Local Education Authorities – for students urgently’

(Appendix 4)

(Further details of the responses in this section can be found in Appendix 5: Frequency Statistics pages 34 to 37 and Appendix 6, Question 18).

The main feeling that is transmitted from this entire section on training is summed up in one response:

'In-service training – don't care who does it so long as we get it'

(Appendix 4)

4.2 Case Study

As previously described, the project with the pilot school began after an INSET training day in the academic year 2003-2004. The follow up support requested was in the form of a series of additional INSET days. Initially, three full day lecture and workshop sessions were arranged for the school staff; both teaching and support staff from early years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 were included. The school selected the topics they felt would be most beneficial to them. The chosen topics were 'Types of Play: with particular reference to Heuristic Play and Discovery Play', 'Planning, Observation, Assessment and Record Keeping: involving children in their planning and record keeping' and 'Outdoor Play'. These sessions involved all the staff in activities together and were designed to give a wider and deeper understanding of children's play and its significance to learning as well as providing practical ideas to be used within the setting.

Following the first two INSET days the school requested further support. Two members of staff from the School of EYE spent an additional six days working alongside the reception staff in the classroom. An agreement was made to use these additional days as evidence towards the work contained in this dissertation. The general arrangements have already been outlined in the methodology section (3.1). The findings will be discussed here.

4.2.1 Pilot Questionnaire

A full transcript of the responses to the initial questionnaire given to the early years' staff in the pilot setting can be found in Appendix 2. These responses were used in the design of the final questionnaire but it is useful to conduct a brief analysis of the

responses in order to assess the feelings and attitudes of this group towards the Foundation Phase and its implementation.

The most common feeling that was expressed was excitement - 9 out of the 12 staff members used this description. The challenge and enormity of the changes were also clearly a consideration for these staff. As one of the support staff said "*I thought – 'How big this?'*" (Appendix 7). Many felt the Foundation Phase would bring benefits for the children, particularly relating to self esteem, enjoyment and motivation to learn.

'A fresh new phase in educating our children. The Foundation Phase gives the children choices and shows them the respect and caring both educationally and emotionally they deserve. Builds self-esteem and confidence by giving them choices.'

'New and exciting opportunities for learning. Opportunities for the children to express themselves. More freedom for young children. More flexibility for staff and children to explore their world.'

'An ideal opportunity to allow children to develop and experience learning at their own pace and choice.'

(Appendix 2)

A clear desire for more guidance and support was also expressed. Pleas were made for financial support and additional resources as well as staff training.

'Rhagor o hyfforddiant. Mwy o wybodaeth. Beth sy'n cael ei gynllunio i'r dyfodol?
Beth yw'r canlyniadau?'
[*'More training. More information. What is being planned for the future? What are the outcomes/results?'*]

'Increased funding, more resources, more input about organization of classroom. More Art and Craft materials.'

'More art and Craft resources. New toys ie:- Multi cultural dolls, new kitchen, cars, garages, dressing up clothes. More emphasis and equipment on outdoor play. Further training and information about the Foundation Phase which is regularly updated.'

Fwy o bobl yn dod mewn i siarad. Ni'n cael y profiad a'r siawns i fynd i weld ysgolion yn yr un sefyllfa. Mwy o arian i brynu pethau.

[‘More people coming in to speak/talk. Us getting the opportunity to visit other schools in the same position. More money to buy things’].

(Appendix 2)

These appeals for guidance and support were recognised by the headteacher and it was hoped that some of the fears could be allayed through support from mentors in the classroom.

4.2.2 Case Study Findings

During the six days the staff from the School of EYE spent in the reception classroom it was clear that, while the staff were keen to learn more about the Foundation Phase and good early years practice, it was going to be much more difficult to make the necessary changes quickly. After an initial period of observation a summary of findings was produced and shown to the staff (see Appendix 9).

The following issues were highlighted as possible starting points:

Children’s physical, emotional and social needs
Children’s intellectual needs
Planning for learning (as opposed to planning for teaching)
(Appendix 9)

After discussion between the reception class staff and the School of EYE, action points 2 and 3 below were chosen as the first to be tackled.

First action points

1. Reflect on the value of snack time and access to drinks, how could this be tackled differently?
2. Workshop area – an area encompassing the messy play (painting, tactile, sand, water and drawing area). Giving children opportunities to explore different media, make choices and display increased independence.
3. Imaginative play area – including opportunities for literacy and mathematical development
4. Observation – all staff to take part in formalised observation of activities/class/children throughout the week. 30 minutes a day?

(Appendix 9)

The support staff were given the responsibility (by the teachers) to develop the creative and messy areas and the headteacher invited in a former early years headteacher to support the staff in the development of creativity and to provide further ideas for activities and display. The School of EYE team provided ideas on the development of literacy and numeracy through play activities. For example, developing literacy in the imaginative play area and block play was considered but little progress has been made to date here. Activities were carried out with children to demonstrate the possibilities for the development of mathematical work in some or all areas of the classroom.

An area where more progress was made was the outdoor environment. The School of EYE staff modelled learning activities and the staff were encouraged to take small groups of children and engage in activities of their choice outside. This was embraced by the setting and daily activities outside are now planned.

The final suggestion of formalised observations has been very successfully trialled. The reception class staff were asked to spend 10 minutes every day observing one child. Two staff were to observe one child in order to encourage discussion and enable informed planning of activities for that particular child. The staff reported back enthusiastically on their findings and were genuinely surprised at what they had found. It was noted that assumptions had been made about particular children and that these misconceptions provided an incomplete, and in some cases, untrue picture of the child. The ratios implemented by the piloting of the Foundation Phase have enabled these observations to continue and more and more children to be included without any reorganisation of the classroom routine. The importance of the development of observation skills and the use that can be made of these to inform planning for individuals and small groups has been recognised by the staff of the pilot setting. The information gleaned from these observations now needs to become part of the reflection and planning process.

The significance of observation to the planning and assessment cycle is also recognised in the consultation document:

By observing children carefully to note their progress, rather than focussing on the attainment of predetermined outcomes,

staff should be able to plan a still more appropriate curriculum that supports children's development according to individual needs. Staff require more guidance on what constitutes good assessment practice in the early years. This guidance for practitioners and adults should enable them to deploy:

- effective early years assessment strategies
- manageable systems for recording observations and for using them in planning to meet children's needs; and
- reporting systems and formats that are easily understood by parents and teachers.

(WAG, 2003: 21)

4.2.3 Findings on feelings six months into the pilot

The final piece of research evidence provided by the case study took the form of individual interviews with each of the 12 early years staff members. The full transcript of these short interviews can be found in Appendix 7. The results of these interviews show very clearly the positive attitude of these staff to the implementation of the Foundation Phase. Ten out of the 12 staff indicated that they still had positive feelings towards the new initiative and 50% of these said they were even more positive now, six months into the pilot. The other two members of staff that were less positive, who interestingly were both teachers, were not entirely negative in their responses, just perhaps more guarded. One indicated that her feelings had fluctuated over the last six months and that her initial positive feelings were returning now but she did suggest that more guidance was still needed. The other said she felt less positive but her remarks did not reflect this:

'1:8 has made a huge difference. We have more flexibility, more experiences. Use space better. Staff gain from new experiences too.

No worries – just need the people.

Disappointed that we have not been able to develop the outside. Hopefully this may still come.'

(Appendix 7)

The adult: child ratio of 1: 8 is very popular amongst the staff (and parents too according to the headteacher and some staff members). It was felt that one area this had enhanced was the development of the children's spoken language and in this setting their development of Welsh. Several of the respondents highlighted this as an area of success worth noting. One support worker said that she was enjoying the work and even felt guilty getting paid but she also reported that: '*Welsh language really coming on – parents are noticing it too.*' (Appendix 7).

The staff reported that the atmosphere in the class was more relaxed and that the children (and some staff) appeared to have increased in confidence (particularly the quieter ones). Children were receiving more attention and the benefits of this were being seen in a reduction in disruptive behaviour (of which there had been little anyway). It was felt that those children who were less ready for formal activities had gained the most as they were not being required to participate in activities in which they could not succeed and were being given more time and opportunity to develop the skills they would need later. Interestingly the concern that '*children would not move on – would not develop*' expressed by one staff member had not materialised. (Appendix 7)

Most of the initial worries and fears had faded or never arisen and a different set of concerns had replaced them. Staff generally felt more confident and knowledgeable about the changes to the curriculum and the new concerns are more specific:

'Some concerns about training – getting different messages.'

'My main concern now is outdoor play – we have no direct access to outdoors.'

'I worry now about getting it to work to convince others. Parents need to understand.'

'I am still worried about evidence and record keeping.'

(Appendix 7)

The concern that staff had about parental perceptions of the Foundation Phase may be unfounded too. As was mentioned in section 4.1.6 of this chapter all the parents of children about to enter year 1 in pilot settings have been canvassed by the Welsh Assembly Government for their opinions on the Foundation Phase initiative and their consent to suspend the requirements to teach the National Curriculum. The responses received in the case study school have been, to date, 100% positive.⁹

⁹ The Pupil Support Division of the Welsh Assembly Government was contacted regarding the response to this consultation exercise. No official response could be given at the time but it was reported that the returns received to date were almost entirely positive (less than 7% had not agreed to 'the removal of the requirements to teach the National Curriculum in Key Stage 1 in the pilot schools' (see Appendix 8 for the relevant documentation).

5. Summary and conclusions

There is clearly a great deal of interest in the development of the Foundation Phase, not only within Wales but also from those in the field elsewhere. The size and speed of the response to the questionnaires demonstrates this as do the articles and comments from English based professionals who are looking to Wales to succeed in this venture in order to restore play based active learning to the centre of the education debate.¹⁰

The results of this study indicate that, unsurprisingly, there is more interest in and engagement with the Foundation Phase from those settings that are involved in the pilot. 61.5% of the pilot settings responded whereas only 31.5% of the non-pilot schools returned the questionnaire. However, the differences between the pilot and non-pilot settings in the actual responses to individual questions and statements tended to be in degree of feeling rather than a difference of opinion.

There was a marked similarity in response from the case study staff and the recipients of the questionnaires. Mixed emotions were prevalent, the most common and strongly felt being 'excitement' and 'looking forward to the challenge', (77% and 83% positive responses respectively). 61% clearly felt the sense of freedom offered by the opportunities presented in the Foundation Phase. The level of apprehension was also relatively high; 40% of questionnaire respondents were feeling apprehensive compared to 46% who were not. These results all indicate a positive response, at least at this early stage, to the proposals. However, while only 22% felt they were unprepared for the Foundation Phase (and 31% were not certain) there was an overwhelming number (81%) who felt they needed more guidance (30% felt this strongly). This desire for guidance and support was also clearly demonstrated by the case study observations and interviews and the written responses included in the returned questionnaires.

¹⁰ The researcher and her colleagues have noted interest from England in response to the Foundation Phase initiative. At a Foundation Stage conference in London for FE and HE staff (March 05) delegates expressed interest, and what could be described as jealousy, at the direction of movement in Wales. Also at the *Nursery World* exhibition in October 2004 Sue Palmer (advisor for the National Literacy Strategy) spoke of the desire to see positive results from the pilot phase and said 'we are all watching you'.

The guidance and support at a national level appear to have been slow to arrive but the types and level of help available also seems to vary between areas. The relevant documents had not been read by a surprisingly high number of respondents and *The Foundation Phase: A Draft Framework for Children's Learning* (ACCAC, 2004) is, in the opinion of the researcher and many of her colleagues, a disappointment. As there is clearly a thirst for additional help, advice and guidance this document in particular is going to be the most eagerly awaited and needs to reflect the ethos and values of good early years practice that the Foundation Phase is based upon. In its present draft form it is simply a marrying of the old curriculum documents and does not have any feeling of entirety or continuity of approach. The title 'areas of learning and experience' used throughout the Desirable Outcomes document (ACCAC, 2000) appears to have been lost in favour of 'areas of learning'. The researcher and others involved in the field of early years mourn this omission. The word 'experience' in this context was significant and highly relevant to the ethos of the document. Children learn through first hand experience, through experimentation and active involvement with their environment. As opposed to losing this title the researcher proposes that it should be reinstated as 'areas of experience and learning' – thereby elevating the significance of the experience; that is, if the curriculum continues to be divided into 'subject areas' at all.

If other curriculum documents from countries such as Sweden and New Zealand are studied, a different emphasis from the *Draft Framework* can be seen. Democratic values of justice, freedom and equality are highlighted. As Doverborg and Pramling Samuelsson say:

Sweden has adopted the life-long learning perspective, also seen in other countries' curricula (see e.g. New Zealand, Ministry of Education 1998).

(Doverborg and Pramling Samuelsson, no date)

And the Swedish preschool curriculum states in its introductory section 'Fundamental values':

'Democracy forms the foundation of the pre-school. For this reason all pre-school activity should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values. Each and everyone working in the pre-school should promote respect

for the intrinsic value of each person as well as respect for our shared environment.

An important task of the pre-school is to establish and help children acquire the values on which our society is based. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between genders as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school shall actively promote in its work with children.

(Ministry of Education and Science in Sweden, 2001: 7)

This document describes the curriculum in terms of children having opportunities to communicate, co-operate and learn, to observe, reflect and explore and says that learning should be based, not only on the interaction between adults and children but also on what children learn from each other. Adults provide guidance and stimulation. There is no mention of areas of knowledge. (Ministry of Education and Science in Sweden, 2001). While these values appear to be advocated by the Learning Country initiative this does not seem to have been translated into the draft guidance.

A similar ethos is demonstrated in the New Zealand early childhood curriculum – *Te Whāriki*. It states in its introduction that the curriculum is

Founded on the following aspirations for children:

To grow up as confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.

(New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996: 9)

The New Zealand curriculum is based on the four principles of Empowerment, Holistic Development, Family and Community and Relationships and its goals are Well-being, Belonging, Contribution, Communication and Exploration. The child and its community are at the centre of the curriculum.

If the Foundation Phase is to succeed it must be more than a 'Phase from 3-7 Years' in name, it must truly represent the development of good early years practice up to the age of 7 years which is advocated in the consultation document (WAG, 2003). It must remove the pressure of a taught curriculum and develop the ethos of supporting and facilitating young children's learning by providing safe, stimulating and caring environments within which children take (at least some) responsibility for their own

learning. Children need the opportunity to develop a thirst for learning and the skills to continue learning by making choices and following their individual interests while having their individual needs met by caring and observant adults.

The development of this new, and some would consider radical, curriculum will need financial support from the Welsh Assembly Government and a commitment by all concerned to develop an understanding of its content and values. Institutes of further and higher education will need to take action to incorporate the new guidance into the courses for teachers and other workers with young children. The skills of observation and reflection will need to be addressed, as will knowledge of child development and an understanding of how children learn and indeed how individual children learn differently. Emphasis will be needed on the preparation of appropriate environments as well as allowing children choice and giving the child responsibility for his or her own learning.

An article in the Times Educational Supplement in May 2004 (Haigh, 2004) suggested that Wales was leading the way in early years education and in returning the child to the centre of the curriculum. But has an opportunity been missed to go further - to make even more radical changes? While there are still areas of learning such as *Knowledge and Understanding of the World* (WAG, 2003; ACCAC, 2004) many of those involved with the Foundation Phase will be tempted, if not forced, to see the curriculum in terms of subjects and knowledge rather than skills. The ethos and values of good early years practice would then lose out to the pressure to teach children facts rather than allowing their knowledge of the world to unfold through their innate desire to learn. The majority of practitioners in this study appear to welcome the challenge of using their imagination and creativity as well as knowledge of child development and theories of learning in order to provide an appropriate curriculum for the children in their care. However, they feel the need for reassurance in what is a new departure and the settings themselves need the support and guidance necessary to allow good early years practice to flourish.

Bibliography

- Abbott, L. and Nutbrown, C. (eds.) *Experiencing Reggio Emilia: implications for pre-school provision* Buckingham: OUP, 2001
- ACCAC *Statutory Baseline Assessment in Wales* Cardiff: ACCAC, 1998
- ACCAC *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning before Compulsory School Age* Cardiff: ACCAC, 2000
- ACCAC *The Foundation Phase in Wales: A Draft Framework for Children's Learning* Cardiff: ACCAC, 2004
- Anning, A. and Edwards, A. *Promoting Children's Learning from Birth to Five – Developing the new early years professional* Buckingham: OUP, 2000
- Bell, J. *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education and Social Science* Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993
- Bilton, H. *Outdoor Play in the Early Years: Management and Innovation* London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd., 2001
- Bowen, B. C. *Froebel and education through self-activity* Bath: C. Chivers, 1966
- Boyd, W. *From Locke to Montessori : a critical account of the Montessori point of view* London: G. G. Harrap and Co., 1914
- Bruce, T. *Early Childhood Education* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987
- Christensen, P. and James A. (eds.) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003
- Cresswell, D. *Margaret McMillan : a memoir* London: Hutchinson, 1948
- DES *The Rumbold Report Starting with Quality. Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Quality of the Educational Experience Offered to 3 and 4 Year Olds* London: HMSO, 1990

DES	<i>Aspects of Primary Education: The Education of Children under Five</i>	London: HMSO, 1989
DfEE	<i>The National Literacy Strategy</i>	London: DfEE, 1998
DfEE	<i>The National Numeracy Strategy</i>	London: DfEE, 1999
ESTYN	<i>Inspection under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996¹¹</i>	Cardiff: ESTYN, 2001
Graue, E. and Walsh, D.J.	<i>Studying Children in Context: Theories, Methods, and Ethics</i>	London: SAGE Publications, 1998
Green, S.	<i>Research Methods in Health, Social and Early Years Care</i>	Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes Publishers Ltd., 2000
Hanney, M	<i>Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds</i>	Cardiff: NAW, 2000
Hayward, F. H.	The educational ideas of Pestalozzi and Froebel	London: Ralph Holland, 1904
Hayward, F. H.	<i>Three historical educators: Pestalozzi, Froebel, Herbart...A lecture</i>	London: Ralph, Holland and Co., 1905
Heafford, M. R.	<i>Pestalozzi: his thought and its relevance to today</i>	London: Methuen 1967
HMSO	<i>Education Reform Act 1988</i>	London: HMSO, 1988
Isaacs, S	<i>The Nursery Years: The Mind of the Child from Birth to Six Years</i>	London: Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1946
Isaacs, S	<i>The Educational Value of the Nursery School</i>	London: BAECE, 1981
Mansbridge, A.	<i>Margaret McMillan : a prophet and pioneer : her life and work.</i>	London: J. M. Dent, 1932

¹¹ Inspection report of the school used in the case study. The school has not been named in order to maintain anonymity.

Ministry of Education and Science in Sweden	<i>Curriculum for the pre-school, Lpfö 98</i>	Stockholm: Fritzes kundservice, 2001
Montessori, M.	<i>The Montessori method</i>	New York: Stokes, 1915
Montessori, M.	<i>Spontaneous activity in education</i>	New York: Schocken Books, 1965
Montessori, M.	<i>The Montessori elementary material.</i>	New York: Schocken Books, 1973
Moss, P. and Pence, A. (eds.)	<i>Valuing Quality in Early Childhood Services: new approaches to defining quality.</i>	London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 1994
Moyles, J.R.	<i>Just Playing? The role and status of play in early childhood education</i>	Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1993
Moyles, J.R. (ed.)	<i>The excellence of play</i>	Maidenhead: OUP, 2004
National Assembly for Wales	<i>Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum</i>	Cardiff: ACCAC, 2000
National Assembly for Wales	<i>Laying the Foundation: Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds. Report of the Education and Life-long Learning Committee</i>	Cardiff: NAW, 2001
New Zealand Ministry of Education	<i>Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa. Early Childhood Curriculum</i>	Wellington N.Z.: Learning Media Ltd., 1996
Nutbrown, C	<i>Threads of thinking: Young children learning and the role of early education</i>	London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 2001
Nutbrown, C (ed.)	<i>Research Studies in Early Childhood Education</i>	Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 2003
Open University Press/Drake	<i>Y Flaen Mathematig</i>	Cardiff: Drake, no date

Pallant, J.	<i>SPSS Survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS</i>	Maidenhead: OUP, 2001
Pascal, C. and Bertram, T.	<i>Effective Early Learning: Case studies in improvement</i>	London: SAGE Publishing, 2001
Plowden Report	<i>Children and their Primary Schools: A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England)</i>	London: HMSO, 1967
Pugh, G. (ed)	<i>Contemporary Issues in the Early Years - Working Collaboratively for Children</i>	London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 2001
QCA	<i>Early Learning Goals</i>	London: QCA, 1999
QCA	<i>Curriculum Guidance for the foundation stage</i>	London: QCA, 2000
SCAA	<i>Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education</i>	London: SCAA, 1996
Schweinhart, L.J.	<i>The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions</i>	High/Scope Press (no date: on line copy only available)
Smith, T. L.	<i>The Montessori System in theory and practice: an introduction to the pedagogic methods of Dr Maria Montessori with some reports of American experience</i>	London: Harper and Brothers, 1912
Sylva, K, Melhuish, E. Sammons, P. Siraj-Blachford, I. Taggart, B. and Elliot, K.	<i>The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the Pre-School Period</i>	London: Institute of Education, 2003
Welsh Assembly Government	<i>Laying the Foundations: Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds</i>	Cardiff: WAG, 2001
Welsh Assembly Government	<i>The Learning Country - A Paving Document</i>	Cardiff: WAG, 2001a
Welsh Assembly Government	<i>The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years</i>	Cardiff: WAG, 2003

- Welsh Assembly Government *Implementation of the Foundation Phase Pilot: Removal of the requirements to teach the National Curriculum at Key Stage 1 in Pilot Schools* Cardiff: WAG, 2005
- Welsh Office *Guidance on Early Years Education: Building Excellent Schools Together* Cardiff: Welsh Office, 1998
- Woodham-Smith, P. *Friedrich Froebel and English education* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969

Journals, articles and additional sources

- BBC, News *Too young for school.* 21 May 2004
- BBC, Panorama *Four Year Olds in School.* 5 October 1998
- Catherwood, D. *New Views on the Young Brain: offerings from developmental psychology to early childhood education.* Published in Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, Vol. 1 No. 1 1999
- Channel 4, Dispatches *Too Much Too Young.* January 1998
- Dennis-Jones, C. *Reading emphasis 'hinders speech'.* EYE Volume 3 No.11 March 2002
- Doverborg, E. and Pramling Samuelsson, I. *Apple cutting and creativity as a mathematical beginning.* Kindergarten Education: Theory, Research and Practice, Vol. 4, No.2 pp 87-103
- Haigh, G. *Forest Gumption.* The Times Educational Supplement 21 May 2004
- Nash, M.J. *Fertile Minds.* Published in Time, Vol. 149 No. 5 February 3, 1997
- OFSTED *The Education of six year olds in England, Denmark and Finland.* www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications July 2003
- Pramling Samuelsson, I. *Learning to Learn: A Study of Swedish Preschool Children.* New York: Springer Verlag, 1990
- Woodhead, C. Radio 4, Today Programme, Conservative Party manifesto 7.3.05

www.learning.wales.gov.uk/foundationphase/pilot-settings
06 January 05

Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to express her thanks to all the respondents of the questionnaire for their valuable input and to the staff and pupils of the pilot school used in the case study. Thanks also to her supervisors; Sian Wyn Siencyn and Dr Geraint Davies, to Elsie Reynolds for her help with translation and Glyn Howells for opening up the world of possibilities offered by SPSS.

This would not have been possible without the support of colleagues, who have not only covered lectures but also given moral support when it was most needed. Thank you Eileen, Ann-Marie, Angela and Sioned. The author is also very grateful to Lis Duffy for her typing and calming presence and the early years' students for their understanding and empathy.

Thank you too to Garry and Ffion who have had to endure having a mad woman living in the study for days on end over the last few months and who have kept her fed and watered at regular intervals.

Finally a great debt of thanks is due to Sian Wyn Siencyn for giving the researcher the opportunity to carry out this study and for her support throughout the programme.