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Evaluating the Foundation Phase: Policy Logic Model and Programme Theory



**Evaluating the Foundation Phase:
Policy Logic Model and Programme Theory**

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary of acronyms

ACCAC	Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales)
AoL	Area of Learning
CD	Creative Development
CDAP	Child Development Assessment Profile
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
DCELLS	Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
DO	Desirable Outcomes
ELP	Foundation Phase National Training Pack Module on 'Experiential Learning in Practice' training pack (2007)
FE	Further Education
FP	Foundation Phase
HE	Higher Education
KS1	Key Stage 1 National Curriculum
KS2	Key Stage 2 National Curriculum
KS3	Key Stage 3 National Curriculum
KS4	Key Stage 4 National Curriculum
KUW	Knowledge and Understanding of the World
L&T	Learning and Teaching Pedagogy
LLC	Language, Literacy and Communication Skills
LNF	Literacy and Numeracy Framework
MD	Mathematical Development
NAfW	National Assembly for Wales
NC	National Curriculum
OBS	Observing Children
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OLH	Outdoor Learning Handbook
P/A	Play/Active Learning
PD	Physical Development
PSDWCD	Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity
RSG	Revenue Support Grant
SF	Skills Framework for 3-19 Year Olds
TLRP	ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme
TSO	Training and Support Officers
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
WISERD	Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods
WLD	Welsh Language Development
zpd	zone of proximal development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aims and Scope

1. The Foundation Phase is a Welsh Government flagship policy of early years education (for 3 to 7-year old children) in Wales. Marking a radical departure from the more formal, competency-based approach associated with the previous Key Stage 1 National Curriculum, it advocates a developmental, experiential, play-based approach to teaching and learning. *The Learning Country: a Paving Document* (NAfW 2001a) notes that following devolution, Wales intended to take its own policy direction in order to 'get the best for Wales'. Getting the best for Wales appeared to involve meeting the challenges of the globalised marketplace (raising levels of basic skills¹); overcoming social disadvantage; building a strong, enterprising society that embraces multiculturalism; and promoting the language and traditions of Wales. Participation was seen as a key approach.
2. This report is the first in a series of reports from the independent evaluation of the Foundation Phase in Wales, commissioned by the Welsh Government and led by the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD).
3. The aim of this report is to develop a policy logic model that outlines the objectives and intended outcomes of the Foundation Phase, including the context to its introduction, the theory, assumptions and evidence underlying its rationale, and its content and key inputs. It is designed to assist in the ongoing evaluation of the policy.
4. This policy logic model is derived from an exploration of the extant documentation relating to the establishment, development, design and content, and implementation of the Foundation Phase, and provides what might be termed the 'official discourse' of the Foundation Phase as outlined by the Welsh Government.
5. Underpinning the Foundation Phase are a number of important theories relating to early childhood development and education. Therefore, in

¹ This is now termed literacy and numeracy in recent Welsh Government policy documents.

order to fully understand the context, rationale and design of the Foundation Phase the report also outlines in detail its ‘programme theory’. This provides the rationale for the approach, pedagogy and curriculum of the Foundation Phase, although it also underpins its context, aims and other inputs.

6. The policy logic model presented here should be regarded as tentative; it represents an initial version of the model. We expect that the model will be refined throughout the evaluation process possibly leading to a second version towards the end of the three-year evaluation.
7. The initial policy logic model is summarised in Figure 1, and includes the following components, as outlined in the HM Treasury’s Magenta Book for evaluating public policy:
 - contextual conditions and problems
 - aims and objectives
 - rationale
 - inputs
 - processes and activities
 - outputs and intermediate outcomes
 - outcomes
 - impacts.
8. The report is structured in accordance with this initial policy logic model. Following an introduction to the Foundation Phase and this report, Chapter 2 outlines and discusses the context, rationale and aims of the Foundation Phase as presented in the ‘official discourse’. This chapter begins to highlight the importance of a programme theory in understanding the Foundation Phase. Chapter 3, therefore, provides details on how we establish the programme theory before presenting and discussing this programme theory in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 continues to outline the policy logic model by emphasising the key inputs, processes and activities of the Foundation Phase. This is followed in Chapter 6 by a presentation of the intended outputs, outcomes and impacts of the Foundation Phase. The last chapter, Chapter 7, begins to describe and discuss some of the key issues that emerge from the development of the

initial policy logic model, including questions about the nature, definition, content, and wider implications of the Foundation Phase.

Context, Rationale and Aims of the Foundation Phase

9. The Foundation Phase consultation document refers to 'shortcomings' in early years classes (particularly the use of overly-formal curriculum and pedagogy in reception classes) and sets out the main aims of the Foundation Phase and how these were to be achieved. This was essentially through the provision of developmentally appropriate activities, adopting informal pedagogies and the integration of Desirable Outcomes (DO) with the programmes of study and focus statements in the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum.
10. Other non-UK countries where formal approaches to learning are delayed until children are older are identified; these may be seen as offering examples of best practice in this area.
11. Preparation for Key Stage 2 National Curriculum is also considered important, alongside the need to establish the necessary foundations for improved attitudes to learning amongst learners throughout their whole schooling and indeed for life. However, little reference is made to the causes or explanations that might underlie overall and differential levels of early years educational achievement.
12. The main aims of the Foundation Phase are officially set out as:
 - raise children's standards of achievement
 - enhance their positive attitudes to learning
 - address their developing needs
 - enable them to benefit from educational opportunities later in their lives
 - help them become active citizens within their communities.
13. In the official discourse for the Foundation Phase, there are no more detailed objectives or related targets outlined.
14. Original proposals for the Foundation Phase suggested a new approach to teaching and learning of young children was needed, but no *a priori* design or model for this new approach was documented prior to its

introduction. For the purposes of this evaluation it is, however, necessary to try and explicitly outline this approach. We refer to this as the Foundation Phase's programme theory, and it is developed through a detailed analysis of the Foundation Phase materials and documentation.

The Foundation Phase Programme Theory

15. In order to develop a framework to support the analysis of the Foundation Phase documentation, we initially explored two broad approaches that are commonly seen to represent 'good' practice within the field of early childhood education: the early years 'child-centred' tradition underpinned by constructivist/developmental theory, and the programmes of Reggio Emilia in Italy, New Zealand (Te Whāriki) and Scandinavia that are underpinned by sociocultural theories. It is noted that these programmes have emergent or light touch frameworks/curricula.
16. The 'Foundation Phase Framework'; 'Learning and Teaching Pedagogy'; 'Play/Active Learning'; 'Observing Children'; and guidance documents relating to each of the Areas of Learning (AoL) were analysed. The 'Experiential Learning in Practice' training pack, the 'Outdoor Learning Handbook', the 'Skills Framework' and 'National Curriculum' and 'Desirable Outcomes' documents were also consulted. The analysis was multi-layered, iterative and reflexive: that is, documents were analysed on numerous occasions and in different ways to enable us to clarify, check and re-check issues and meanings within and across the documentation and to reconsider and question our initial assumptions. Findings were considered in relation to 'approach', 'pedagogy' and 'curriculum'.
17. Approach: We find that the approach underpinning the Foundation Phase is explicitly developmental with a clear focus on the individual child. Development is seen as essentially linear, although not tied to chronological age, and recognises individual variations in rate within and across all areas of development and learning. This approach broadly relates to a constructivist theory of learning.
18. Pedagogy: We find that aspects of suggested pedagogy also reflect constructivist theory although ideas resonating with sociocultural perspectives are emphasised – for example, a clear role is indicated for

the practitioner in supporting children's learning and development. However, sociocultural ideas such as empowerment and play appear to be focused primarily on supporting effective learning rather than being seen as a 'right' or as a way of promoting personal growth. Similarly, when viewed through a sociocultural lens, links with the home may be viewed as an 'early intervention' rather than as a genuine bi-directional partnership.

19. An initial challenge for practitioners may be to identify what is meant by key terminology – this includes, 'structured play', 'active learning' and particularly 'child-initiated' and 'practitioner-directed' learning – and in determining the suggested balance between these two strategies. This may be particularly significant in the final year of the Foundation Phase. In addition, a small number of discrepancies are noted given recent developments in neuroscience and its application to education.
20. Curriculum: We find that to a greater or lesser extent, Area of Learning (AoL) descriptors and guidance documents reflect a commitment to a developmental approach and to constructivist and sociocultural pedagogies. Sociocultural perspectives are also reflected in the placing of 'Personal and Social Development, Wellbeing and Cultural Diversity' at the core of the Foundation Phase.
21. In the Framework, initial focus statements for each AoL tend to emphasise content and ways of working that are relevant to the earlier stages of the 'learning continuum', only referring briefly to more complex, higher level skills. This may suggest an emphasis on the development of early conceptual knowledge across the Foundation Phase and a 'lighter touch' approach to the statutory curriculum. However, 'skills and range' statements and, in particular, the guidance documents are much more explicit in detailing subject-related content and children's progression in relation to this. This is particularly apparent in 'Mathematical Development' and especially 'Language, Literacy and Communication Skills'. This may suggest a particular emphasis should be placed on these AoLs.
22. It is noted that in order to gain a more holistic and detailed understanding of the Foundation Phase, it is necessary to examine a range of

documents: elements of the approach and pedagogy are distributed across various publications. The current analysis of Foundation Phase documentation reveals that there is no single clear explanation for the approach and pedagogy of the Foundation Phase that practitioners could use.

Inputs, Processes and Activities of the Foundation Phase

23. The Foundation Phase made statutory the delivery of seven Areas of Learning. These are:

- Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity (PSDWCD)
- Language, Literacy and Communication Skills (LLC)
- Mathematical Development (MD)
- Welsh Language Development (WLD) (in English-medium schools and settings)
- Knowledge and Understanding of the World (KUW);
- Physical Development (PD)
- Creative Development (CD).

24. Introductory focus statements for each AoL tend to emphasise approaches that may be adopted in earlier stages of the 'learning continuum', only referring briefly to complex, higher level skills.

25. Another key input is the statutory Foundation Phase End of Phase Assessment, obtained through teacher assessment.

26. The major financial input in the Foundation Phase relates to new (higher) adult-to-child ratios –1:8 in nursery and reception classes; 1:15 in Years 1 and 2. Additional resources have also been made available to schools to develop their outdoor learning environments.

27. New training modules have been developed for practitioners, including the recruitment of Training and Support Officers in each local authority. Most support and training for existing staff is provided through local authorities, and their early years advisors. There are additional annual conferences organised by the Welsh Government.

28. Originally a statutory Child Development Assessment Profile was introduced to provide a baseline measurement of child development. However, this was withdrawn during 2011/12 following concerns about its fit for purpose and the length of time the assessment took. A new baseline tool is due to be developed.
29. The implementation of the Foundation Phase began with a Pilot phase in 2004/05 in 22 schools and 22 funded non-maintained settings. The final roll-out of the Foundation Phase to all schools and funded non-maintained settings was delayed from the original timetable until 2008/09. In the meantime an additional 22 schools and 22 funded non-maintained settings were allowed to introduce the Foundation Phase in 2006/07 to link in with the Flying Start programme, an early years intervention for disadvantaged families and communities. In each phase the Foundation Phase was introduced sequentially to one or two cohorts of children.
30. The Welsh Government funded an evaluation of the Pilot phase schools in 2004/06 and then later a study on the transition from the Foundation Phase to Key Stage 2 in 2009/10.

Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts of the Foundation Phase

31. The early years education of all children aged 3 to 7-years-old in Wales has now been through the Foundation Phase.
32. During the implementation and roll-out of the Foundation Phase, a number of documents have been published for practitioners and parents.
33. The Foundation Phase is funded via two funding streams. The first is the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) which is to fund free part-time entitlement for 3 and 4-year-olds. How the money from the RSG is spent is up to the discretion of each local authority, although they have a statutory duty to provide this provision. The second funding stream is the Foundation Phase Grant. Its terms and conditions state that the funding must be used to fund the 1:8 and 1:15 adult to child ratios in the maintained sector, the appointment of a training and support officer and a dedicated training programme for all practitioners, and to provide all funded non-maintained settings with at least 10% of a qualified teacher's time.

34. Despite the terms and conditions set out for the Foundation Phase Grant, there is limited data available on actual adult-to-child ratios in Foundation Phase classrooms.
35. Training and support has been provided through local authorities, although there is no national data relating to participation on training activities. Neither are there any targets for participation in training at the individual, school, local authority or national levels.
36. In the original documentation for the Foundation Phase there are few explicit outcomes or targets outlined. However, a range of outcomes can be identified, although most will take several years before the impact of the Foundation Phase can be ascertained:
- greater motivation and concentration and enhanced learning dispositions by age 7
 - some improvement in educational average achievement by age 11+ (e.g. literacy, numeracy, Welsh language)
 - reduced differential attainment between particular groups of children by age 11+ (e.g. by socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity)
 - improved average educational achievement by age 15 and fewer school leavers with no qualifications
 - higher rates of participation in post-compulsory education (FE and HE)
 - improved wellbeing and strengthened dispositions to learning for all learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds
 - lower rates of average non-attendance for all learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds
 - improved social and emotional development amongst children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds
 - greater involvement of parents/carers in the education experience of children.
37. In addition, a number of broader impacts can also be identified as:
- improved preparation for learning for KS2 onwards
 - raised educational achievement of children at age 15 (KS4)

- increased participation in post-compulsory education (e.g. FE and HE) or other vocational training
- alleviating some of the impact of socio-economic disadvantage for learners
- increased social and emotional wellbeing for children and young people
- improved inter-generational transmission of positive attitudes and influence on education and learning
- reduced socio-economic disparities within Wales.

Discussion and Conclusions

38. The development of this policy logic model will help guide the ongoing evaluation of the Foundation Phase, although it is expected that this model will develop as further information and evidence is gathered.

39. However, in preparing the initial policy logic model a number of issues and questions have been identified that the evaluation must contend with and address as it develops. These can be summarised as:

- micro-level problems and conditions versus macro-level aims
- no predetermined indicators for measuring the impact of the Foundation Phase
- 'qualitative dimensions' of the Foundation Phase aims difficult to measure
- rationale for key components of the Foundation Phase not explicitly or formally set out
- no specific targets for some of the Foundation Phase inputs (e.g. participation in training)
- tensions in the underlying pedagogy and curriculum of the Foundation Phase
- formalising the informal nature of the Foundation Phase.

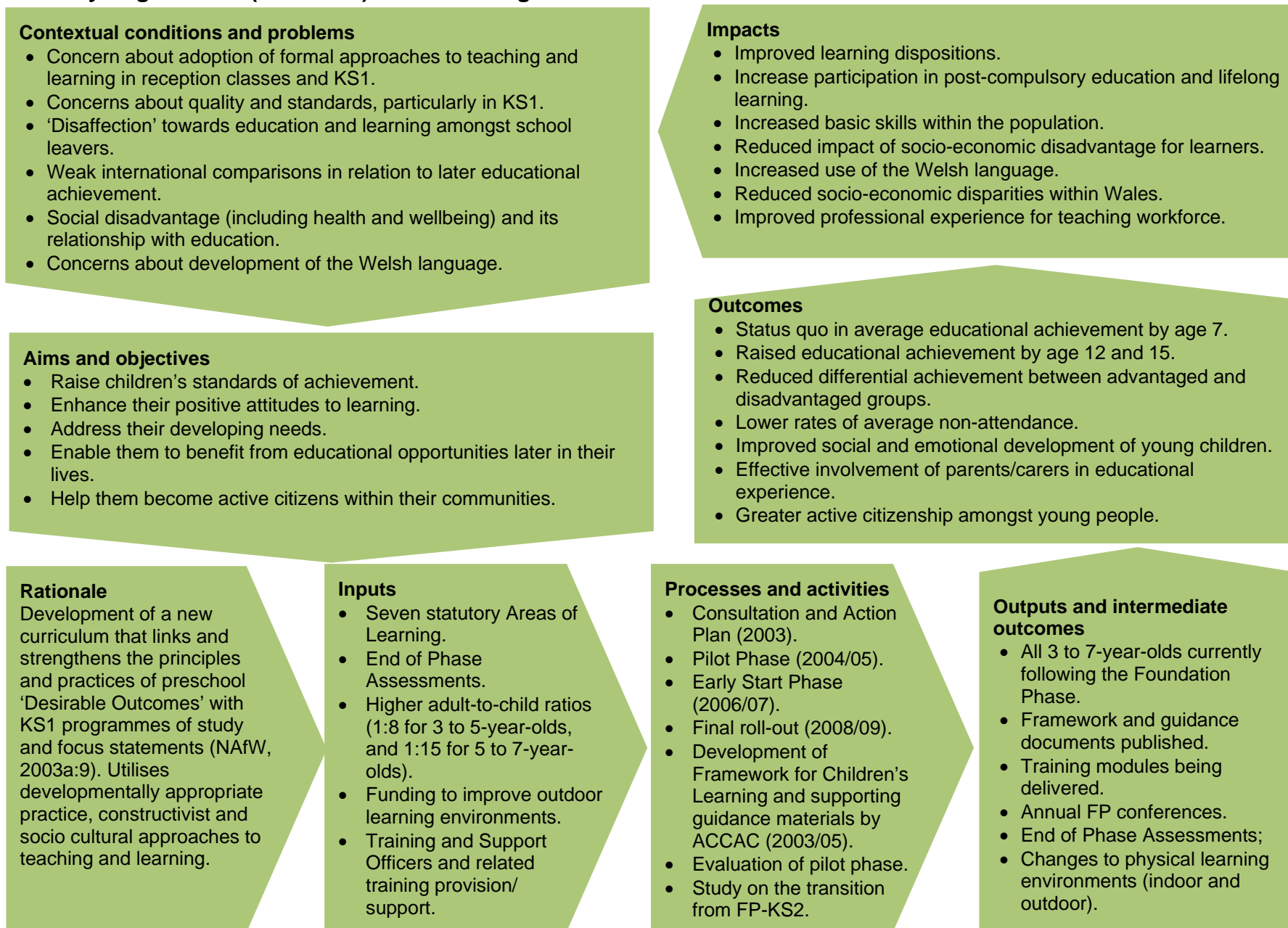
40. The report suggests that these issues limit the evaluation in various ways, not least in determining the most appropriate way of measuring the impact of the Foundation Phase, whether it is in terms of implementation or outcomes.

41. Furthermore, it is possible that the issues highlighted here could have limited the ability of the Welsh Government, schools and practitioners to implement the Foundation Phase successfully and completely. The ongoing evaluation will be able to explore this further.
42. The approach, pedagogy and curriculum promoted in the Foundation Phase appear to address the identified concerns and aims as set out in *The Learning Country* (NAfW 2001a) and the Foundation Phase consultation exercise (NAfW 2003a). The adoption of an underpinning ‘developmental’ approach and a constructivist but largely sociocultural pedagogy – along with placing ‘Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity’ at the core of the Foundation Phase – may ensure that children’s learning and development, including their wellbeing, positive learning dispositions and positive attitudes to cultural diversity, are supported through appropriate, interesting and meaningful activities and experiences. This should lead to greater social competence and higher achievement in the longer term, and the motivation to become lifelong learners.
43. Retaining a statutory, detailed, skills-focused curriculum, particularly in relation to aspects of Mathematical Development and Language, Literacy and Communication Skills, and an expectation that practitioners will undertake some direct teaching, may ensure that young children, particularly those from disadvantaged homes, are supported in the early development of literacy and numeracy; this may be crucial for their later achievement. This approach, which is echoed in the recent proposals to introduce a National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) for learners aged 5-14 alongside National Reading and Numeracy Tests for 7 to 14-year-olds, may also ensure that there is no significant slippage in achievements and assessed outcomes before children enter secondary education. In addition, identifying Welsh Language Development as a discrete area of learning within English medium schools and settings with expectations that broadly match those of the Language, Literacy and Communication Skills AoL, may support the development of Wales as a bilingual nation.

44. We suggest there are two key challenges for Foundation Phase practitioners. The first is to ascertain what is meant by some of the terminology used in the documentation – particularly in relation to pedagogy. The second is to ascertain how a play-based pedagogy, which is underpinned by a strongly developmental approach, can best be integrated or intertwined with a detailed statutory curriculum in which expectations in relation to outcomes essentially remain unchanged. The extent to which practitioners have understood and responded to these apparently conflicting demands/requirements will be a key focus in evaluating the Foundation Phase.
45. Globalisation has opened up the world of early childhood programmes and the apparent long-term effects of these. Whether it is possible or appropriate to draw on programmes that have different culturally embedded philosophical and political roots and values has been questioned. Globalisation appears also to have stimulated a need for nations to ensure they have a well-educated workforce in order to compete in the global marketplace: one of the key drivers for the establishment of the Foundation Phase.
46. In relation to the effects of globalisation, one of the major tensions that has been considered is between programmes that fit within a ‘social pedagogy’ model associated with, for example, Scandinavian early years programmes, and the ‘school readiness’ or ‘pre-primary’ model found in, for example, England and the USA. However, instead of viewing these models in tension with one another, it is possible to see them as at either end of the same continuum.
47. An example of an approach that embraces school readiness but resonates with aspects of social pedagogy is ‘Developmentally Appropriate Practice’ (DAP), a set of principles and guidelines that draws on different theoretical ideas and which is underpinned by a commitment to child development. Mapping out the key elements of DAP and the Foundation Phase, it is clear that there are many resonances between the two programmes but also some differences: in particular that in DAP curricular goals are likely to be light touch and regionally or locally agreed.

48. In recent years, the pressure of the globalised marketplace has led to early years programmes firmly underpinned by a model of social pedagogy (such as the early years programmes of Sweden and Norway) now coming more under state control and incorporating aspects of the 'school readiness' or 'pre-primary' approach – that is, incorporating the teaching of early literacy and numeracy skills.
49. A key challenge faced by the Welsh Government then is not unique: how to support children's wellbeing and their development as lifelong learners while also ensuring their later academic success. Programmes adopting sociocultural pedagogies may result in long-term benefits in relation to social development and motivation to pursue higher education, so addressing any concerns about pupil disaffection. However, teacher-initiated approaches involving 'explicit teaching' ('practitioner-directed' approaches) can reduce knowledge gaps in young children's literacy and numeracy skills, which are strong predictors of children's later academic success. These approaches may be particularly important as an intervention for young children who are disadvantaged by poor home learning environments. It may therefore be prudent to ensure early childhood programmes include some practitioner-directed activities alongside largely child-initiated activities.

Figure 1: Policy Logic Model (Version 1) for Evaluating the Foundation Phase



1 Introduction

- 1.1. This report is the first of a series of reports from the independent evaluation of the Foundation Phase in Wales commissioned by the Welsh Government, led by the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD). The three year evaluation (2011-2014) has four main aims:
- to evaluate how well the Foundation Phase is being implemented and highlight ways in which improvement can be made
 - to evaluate what impact the Foundation Phase has had to date
 - to assess the value for money of the Foundation Phase
 - to put in place an evaluation framework for the future tracking of outputs and outcomes of the Foundation Phase.
- 1.2. The Foundation Phase appears to mark a radical departure from the more formal, competency-based approach to early childhood education that has sometimes been associated with the National Curriculum. Drawing on evidence from good early years programmes in Scandinavia, Reggio Emilia and New Zealand (Te Whāriki) that indicate the adoption of an overly formal curriculum and extensive formal teaching before the age of six or seven can result in lower standards of attainment in the longer term, it promotes an experiential, play-based approach to learning for children aged 3 to 7-years-old. It emphasises the centrality of the child and the significance of children's wellbeing and advocates a balance of child-initiated and practitioner-directed² (or practitioner-initiated) activities within stimulating indoor and outdoor environments.
- 1.3. One of the first stages to this evaluation is the development of a '*policy logic model*' that outlines the objectives and intended outcomes of the Foundation Phase and "describes the theory, assumptions and evidence underlying the rationale for a policy. It does this by linking the

² In all current correspondence and new documentation, this is now referred to as child-initiated and adult-led activities.

intended outcomes (both short and long-term) with the policy inputs, activities, processes and theoretical assumptions” (HM Treasury 2011:41).

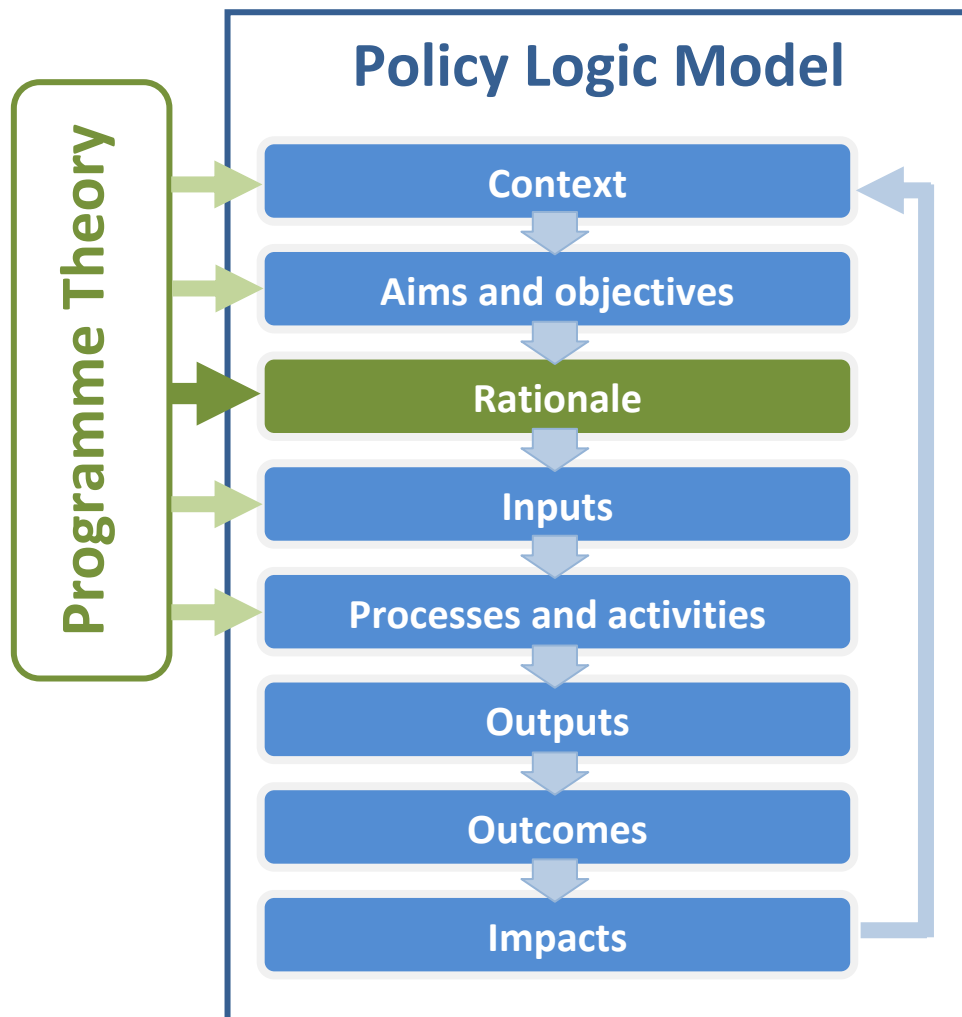
1.4. The aim of this report, then, is to present an initial policy logic model for the Foundation Phase. This is primarily to aid the design and progress of the evaluation, by identifying what might be termed the ‘official discourse’ of the Foundation Phase as outlined by the Welsh Government. A policy logic model attempts to explain how the policy is intended to achieve its objectives, and in turn to help “clearly identify the evaluation objectives and research questions which will direct the evaluation approach, and inform the types of data and information that need to be collected” (HM Treasury 2011:39). This is achieved through an exploration of the extant documentation relating to the establishment, development and implementation of the Foundation Phase, published by the Welsh Government since devolution in 1999 and leading up to the beginning of the evaluation in 2011. The main policy document that underpins this new early years curriculum is the Foundation Phase Framework for Children’s Learning for 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales, supported by a series of additional guidance documents.

1.5. In developing a policy logic model for the Foundation Phase, the report attempts to outline and describe the *context* for the introduction of the Foundation Phase, its *aims*, its educational *rationale* (including the underpinning theoretical *approach* and suggested *pedagogy*), its *inputs* (including its *statutory curriculum*), its *processes and activities*, and its intended *outcomes* (Figure 2).

1.6. As will be demonstrated throughout the report, underpinning the Foundation Phase are a number of important theories relating to early childhood development and education. Therefore, in order to fully understand the context, rationale and design of the Foundation Phase, it is necessary to explore these theories in some detail. We term this

the ‘programme theory’ of the Foundation Phase. This contributes to the policy logic model in a number of ways (Figure 2), particularly in establishing the rationale for the Foundation Phase, and provides the approach, pedagogy and curriculum that practitioners are expected to use.

Figure 2: Policy Logic Model and Programme Theory



1.7. However, it is helpful to see the policy logic model and the programme theory as distinct in two key ways. First, their origins are somewhat distinct – we see the policy logic model as a result of policy

development and making, whereas the origins of the programme theory that underpins much of the policy, are based on educational theories derived from research in education, psychology, neuroscience and sociology, and from an exploration of other early years programmes in other countries.

- 1.8. Second, they are enacted differently – many elements of the Foundation Phase can be characterised as a series of policy instruments, enacted through legislation, funding and inspection; but a key dimension to the Foundation Phase is a new approach to teaching and learning, enacted through guidance and curricular materials to encourage practitioners to approach the education of 3 to 7-year-olds differently. This means that the approach, pedagogy and to some extent the curriculum of the Foundation Phase are largely ‘recommended’, and are not mandatory in the same way that other *inputs* of the Foundation Phase can be ‘enforced’. Consequently, the way in which the programme theory is understood (by policy-makers), then presented (to practitioners) and then enabled (by practitioners) is possibly critical in understanding how the Foundation Phase has been implemented and what impact that has had. Therefore, given its importance and complexity, much of the report is devoted to discussing the Foundation Phase programme theory.
- 1.9. It is important to note, however, that it is not the intention of this report to evaluate the appropriateness, implementation or effectiveness of the Foundation Phase at this stage. Nor does it intend to evaluate the process of policy development and policy implementation. However, in developing a policy logic model, and from analysing the official discourse of the Foundation Phase, the report does raise a number of questions and issues that will help shape and guide the rest of the evaluation. In particular, the report examines the clarity of explanations and coherence of ideas and terminology within and across the official documentation, and attempts to reveal the underpinning logic, or ‘warrant’, for the Foundation Phase and its components. The report

also considers the impact of recent research from early years education and its cognate disciplines on the underlying rationale and design of the Foundation Phase.

1.10. It should also be noted that in an evaluation of this nature the policy logic model at this stage can only be tentative and will be refined as the evaluation progresses. This is the same approach as taken by the interim evaluation of the Welsh Government programme, Flying Start (White and McCrindle 2010). One of the main aims of the evaluation is to develop an evaluation framework for the future impact of the Foundation Phase. This may include the development of a second, more comprehensive, policy logic model, one that is based on further detailed evidence on the content and implementation of the Foundation Phase, and from testing a variety of methods for analysing the impact of the Foundation Phase.

1.11. It is also worth noting that the Foundation Phase is not a straightforward policy with a distinct set of 'aims' (i.e. that provide a clear departure from the aims of the previous educational programme, or 'control'). Similarly, the Foundation Phase does not have a clear and distinct set of 'actions' for practitioners (i.e. a set of tools or practices that are clearly distinct from the 'control'). Although the Foundation Phase promotes a new pedagogical approach (as will be shown), it should be noted that it is, rather, a *continuous development* of the previous Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning Before Compulsory School Age and Key Stage 1 National Curriculum that consequently involves a great deal of implicit assumptions about its aims and actions. The fact that it continues to contribute to compulsory schooling, continues to lead in to the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum, continues to be delivered within a relatively unchanged education system (schools, teachers, local authorities), etc, highlights that early years education in Wales today, in its broadest sense, could equally be characterised by its commonalities rather than its distinctiveness from the early schooling of five years ago.

- 1.12. The report attempts to outline a policy logic model for the Foundation Phase and is structured accordingly. Chapter 2 begins by outlining the context to the establishment of the Foundation Phase and importantly, the need to shift from the previous Key Stage 1 National Curriculum. It explores the initial consultation document on the proposed Foundation Phase and ascertains, in relation to classroom practice, the concerns that appeared to pave the way for reform. This leads in to an introduction of the 'official' rationale and aims of the Foundation Phase. This highlights the importance of the underlying theories and principles – the programme theory – in the development of a new approach to teaching and learning in early years education.
- 1.13. In order to develop the programme theory, a detailed analysis of the published documents relating to the Foundation Phase was undertaken. In order to build a framework for analysis, we explore the key elements of a number of these programmes and describe some of the underpinning influences and theories of learning in Chapter 3.
- 1.14. Chapter 4 then sets out to present the programme theory based on this analysis. It begins with a brief description of how we went about the analysis of documentation before presenting our findings: summarising and commenting on the key issues in relation to the approach, pedagogy, curriculum and associated outcomes. Issues of clarity and coherence are also addressed in this chapter.
- 1.15. Chapter 5 continues to outline the remaining elements of the policy logic model, emphasising the key inputs, processes and activities used in the development of the Foundation Phase.
- 1.16. Chapter 6 concludes the presentation of a policy logic model by reporting the key outputs of the Foundation Phase thus far, alongside a discussion on the intended outcomes and impacts of the Foundation Phase.

1.17. In developing a policy logic model, a number of key issues and questions are identified to help inform the development of the evaluation of the Foundation Phase. These are presented in Chapter 7, and are then followed by a discussion about the nature and definition of the Foundation Phase. The report concludes by discussing the Foundation Phase in a wider frame and considers how the pressures of globalisation appear to be affecting early education policies even in countries that have previously been committed to a model of social pedagogy: that is, there has been a move towards 'school readiness'. It briefly outlines the many similarities and also some of the differences between the key elements of 'Developmentally Appropriate Practice', an approach that embraces 'school readiness' but resonates with aspects of 'social pedagogy', and the Foundation Phase. Finally, it asks how governments can ensure all children are prepared to compete in the global marketplace (which may indicate a focus on the direct teaching of literacy and numeracy) while also ensuring all children are supported in becoming effective lifelong learners and well-rounded citizens (which may indicate a focus on supporting children's social/emotional needs).

2 The Context, Rationale and Aims of the Foundation Phase

- 2.1 Following devolution in 1999, the National Assembly for Wales set out a ten-year strategy for education and lifelong learning in *The Learning Country: a Paving Document* (NAfW 2001a). This policy was to herald a new era of education policy divergence in Wales. Jane Davidson, then Assembly Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, noted in the foreword: “we share key strategic goals with 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” (2001:2). In particular, the latter identified the need to “build stronger foundations for learning in primary schools” (p.12) and to “give every child a flying start” (p.15). *The Learning Country* (2001a) also identified the need to promote equality of opportunity and to tackle social disadvantage.
- 2.2 ‘Getting the best for Wales’ involved attending to the country’s specific priorities. These included meeting the challenges of the globalised marketplace (technological and competitive pressures from within Europe and beyond, *ibid* 2001:1), particularly given the relatively low skills base, and addressing social disadvantage and inequality of opportunity. There was therefore a perceived need to lift the knowledge and skills base, raise standards of literacy and numeracy and promote a culture of lifelong learning, support and improve health and wellbeing, build an enterprising and creative culture that celebrates diversity and promotes the traditions and language of Wales (2001).
- 2.3 In turn, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (e.g. *Children and Young People: A framework for partnership* (Welsh Government 2000)) has played a part in developing education policy in Wales. For example, participation was seen as a key approach: through putting “local authorities, local communities and locally determined needs and priorities at the centre of the agenda for

schools” (NAfW 2001:2); through encouraging the participation of children and young people on community life; and, for example, through establishing schools’ councils.

2.4 These policy aims were later developed in *The Learning Country 2: Delivering the Promise* (2006) to ensure that all children and young people:

- have a flying start in life and the best possible basis for their future growth and development
- have access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities, including acquisition of essential personal and social skills
- enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation
- have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities
- are listened to, treated with respect, and are able to have their race and cultural identity recognised
- have a safe home and a community that supports physical and emotional wellbeing
- are not disadvantaged by any type of poverty.

2.5 In terms of early years education, *The Learning Country* (2001a) noted the government’s intention to consult on whether, and if so how best to, integrate the current *Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning before Compulsory School Age* (ACCAC, 1996) into the primary school curriculum and to enable practitioners to support “children’s rounded progress” (2001:20) through a proposed Foundation Phase for children aged 3 to 7-years-old.

2.6 This led to a consultation document, *The Learning Country: The Foundation Phase – 3 to 7 years* (2003a), which identified ten ‘shortcomings’ in early years education (p.5) and eight ‘shortcomings’ in Key Stage 1. (p.5-6). The primary source for these issues appears to

have been from Estyn inspections and reports. These 'shortcomings' were identified as:

Early years education

- The percentage of 'very good' standards and teaching is generally low.
- Children spend too much time doing tasks while sitting at tables rather than learning through well-designed opportunities for play. They do not have enough opportunity to develop their language skills by talking about their activities. The emphasis on sedentary non-interactive desk-based work does not contribute well to developing independence and decision-making.
- Too little emphasis is placed on developing children's creative expression and cultural understanding.
- There is less progress in promoting children's language, literacy and communication skills than in the other areas of learning.
- Too often, children are introduced to the formal skills of reading and writing before they are ready, with heavy formality and with the risk that some will lose both confidence and a love of learning.
- In some settings, adults do not give children a good start in learning Welsh.
- Almost half of the settings do not plan or assess effectively and do not keep records that are easily understood by anyone other than the person who compiled them.
- There is more 'good' and 'very good' work in nursery schools and units than in reception classes.
- In some classes, the high child-to-adult ratio means that there are insufficient staff to provide the support and range of experiences required.
- The unsatisfactory condition of buildings often limits both the indoor and outdoor space available for play and practical activities.

Key Stage 1

- Pupils' standards of achievement have weaknesses in some aspects in just over a third of classes.

- The quality of teaching has some weak aspects in almost 40% of classes.
- In some classes, teachers do not set work that meets the needs of individual pupils and they are not given enough opportunities to develop independence, not least as learners.
- There is a gap between Year 1 and Year 2 in the percentage of 'good' and 'very good' standards in almost all subjects. The percentage of pupils achieving 'good' and 'very good' standards in Year 1 has been lower than in Year 2 for the last three years.
- There is a gap between the amount of 'good' and 'very good' teaching, particularly in English, mathematics and science, between Year 1 and Year 2. The quality of teaching in Year 1 has been lower than in Year 2 in most subjects over the last three years.
- Many teachers make limited use of assessment to promote high standards.
- Parents are given informative assessment reports about their children's progress in only about a quarter of primary schools.
- *Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig* is given limited attention in some classes and pupils do not gain enough knowledge about other cultures.

2.7 Many of these 'shortcomings' demonstrated concern about the use of formal approaches to teaching and learning in the first few years of schooling. As noted above, it was maintained that, "Teachers introduce formal learning too soon, before some pupils are ready" (*The Learning Country: The Foundation Phase – 3 to 7 years*, NAFW 2003a:5). It was argued that this could result in "some children underachieving and attaining lower standards" (NAFW 2003a:14). This was seen as particularly concerning in relation to the teaching of reading and writing: "an over-emphasis on making children read and write, before they are ready to do so, can be counter-productive" (Ibid:11) with a risk that children will "lose both confidence and a love of learning" (Ibid:5).

- 2.8 The same document pointed to a number of countries where formal approaches to learning are delayed until children are older. This international comparison (in achievement and in the perceived quality of education) tends to permeate many Welsh Government policy documents, with a clear view that the best practice from around the world should be considered in developing education policies in Wales, and particularly in developing the Foundation Phase.
- 2.9 The report noted that in countries such as Australia, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway there is little or no formal teaching of literacy and numeracy until the children are older. As a result, “when children in these countries are introduced to the more formal literacy skills, they make rapid progress” (Ibid: 11). In relation to language development, the main focus of this phase, therefore, should be on “developing children’s speaking and listening skills, as these will form a sound basis for future success in reading and writing” (Ibid: 11).
- 2.10 The original consultation document for the Foundation Phase suggested, therefore, that a new programme should be “designed to provide a better preparation for, and a sound complement to, learning at Key Stage 2” (NAfW 2003a:6).
- 2.11 It is important to note that very little reference to the particular issues relating to education achievement (e.g. KS1 attainment) is given in much of the early Foundation Phase documentation. Although some reference to pupil achievement was noted in the original Foundation Phase consultation document (above). This is particularly striking given, as will be shown later, one of the key aims of the Foundation Phase is to raise children’s standards of achievements.
- 2.12 However, *The Learning Country* (NAfW 2001a) did highlight the need to maintain progress in improving levels of Key Stage 2 achievement – noting that the 60 to 70 per cent target range for pupils aged 11 meeting level 4 or above was met in 2000 (p.19). *The Learning Country*

(NAfW 2001a) also highlighted the need to reduce the gap in achievement between boys and girls (p.19). Although it is again notable that there is little reference to differential attainment of any group of children in the early Foundation Phase documentation. *The Learning Country: Vision into Action* (NAfW 2003b) also primarily focused on standards of achievement in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, and noted that low levels of achievement in GCSEs (at age 15) can lead to increased disaffection towards education and learning after compulsory education.

2.13 However, during the inception of the Foundation Phase it is perhaps notable that there was little mention or discussion of the (growing) research evidence to support the claim that intervention in early years education and provision is central to later educational achievement, although this may have been implied. Critically, little attention is given to the details of that research evidence other than that early intervention would have positive outcomes (e.g. Melhuish 2004). This was not really acknowledged until the Foundation Phase was already being developed (e.g. *The Learning Country 2: Delivering the Promise* (NAfW 2006).

2.14 The overarching aim of the Foundation Phase was, therefore, to provide a new statutory curriculum for 3 to 7-year-olds (*The Learning Country* 2001a). And in line with the issues highlighted above, the main aims of the FP, as set out in the original proposals, were to:

- raise children's standards of achievement
- enhance their positive attitudes to learning
- address their developing needs
- enable them to benefit from educational opportunities later in their lives
- help them become active citizens within their communities

(NAfW 2003a:6).

- 2.15 Other than the main aims, it is notable that there were no further detailed objectives and related targets. Only one of these main aims (to raise standards of achievement) could be immediately and reliably measured.
- 2.16 The proposals for a Foundation Phase for children aged 3 to 7-years-old, published in 2003, built on the findings of the ‘Hanney’ Report³ (NAfW 2001b) (The Education and Lifelong Learning Committee’s Policy Review *Laying the Foundations: Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds*) and the *Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning Before Compulsory School Age* (ACCAC 1996). They were informed by “sound evidence from a comprehensive literature review” (foreword, NAfW 2003a) along with evidence from discussions with and findings presented by, amongst others, Estyn, the Assembly’s Early Years Advisory Panel and key stakeholders.
- 2.17 It was maintained that the proposal for a Foundation Phase drew heavily on evidence gained from “research into good practice in Wales and beyond” (2003a:1). The approach set out was therefore deliberately eclectic and there were explicit and implicit references to programmes from across Europe and beyond and in particular from Scandinavia, New Zealand (Te Whāriki) and Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy.
- 2.18 The proposals confirmed that this would be achieved by “adapting and integrating the Desirable Outcomes with the programmes of study and focus statements in the current KS1 National Curriculum” (NAfW 2003a:9).

³ Margaret Hanney (NAfW 2001b) reported on the findings of extensive consultation undertaken to consider the current pattern of educational provision for 3-year-olds in Wales and to assess the appropriateness, costs and impact of any expansion. Hanney noted that the considerable international, research-based evidence that starting formal learning too early – before the age of 6 – “was detrimental to the development of the child” (2001b:8) and that the foundation for future learning should be provided through an “appropriate developmental curriculum in harmony with the child’s particular needs and interests” (2001b:16).

- 2.19 A more appropriate – developmentally appropriate – approach that would enable children to “benefit from educational opportunities later in their lives... [and so] reach their potential” (Ibid 2003a:6), was proposed. This was a ‘child-centred’ approach to learning⁴, that strengthens, clarifies and extends the principles and practice set out in Desirable Outcomes (ACCAC 1996:9,14) and incorporates a holistic curriculum – a curriculum based on Areas of Learning rather than separate subjects.
- 2.20 In relation to pedagogy, the report noted that “the most effective early years programmes emphasise exploration, problem-solving, active involvement, language development and different types of play” (NAfW 2003a:9) as well as practical activities and investigation (p.5). This included play and exploration in the outdoor environment (p.13). The report maintained that maximum use should be made of the outdoor environment (p.15) which “features strongly in the experiences offered to young children in many countries, including those with climates similar to or more variable than our own” (p.13) so providing children with opportunities for “real life problem solving and enabling children to learn about, enjoy and care for the environment” (p.13).
- 2.21 A clear role for the practitioner working “alongside groups of children and individuals, responding spontaneously to their needs and interests and challenging and motivating them to move to the next stage in their learning” (p.13) was set out. It maintained, also, that in the last year of the Foundation Phase, “or earlier for those who show readiness” (p.15) children should also be “progressively introduced to more formal ways of working” (p.13).
- 2.22 Other issues highlighted in the proposal were that children’s personal and social development and wellbeing should be placed at the core of the Foundation Phase – as in Denmark, Reggio Emilia and New

⁴ It is noted that the proposals “are fully in accord with the child-centred principles underlying the Assembly Government’s Framework for Children and Young People” (foreword).

Zealand (p.11); that teachers should encourage children's independence and decision-making – as in Denmark, Germany, Reggio Emilia and New Zealand as well as in the High/Scope programme (p.10); their creative and expressive skills and observation – as in Reggio Emilia and Spain (p.12); and support children as lifelong learners – for example, developing children's thinking skills (p.9) and strengthening their dispositions to learn (p.10) – as promoted in New Zealand).

2.23 The significance of children's early home learning experiences was also recognised, as was the need to give attention to developing children's bilingualism and multi-cultural understanding (pp.12-13) (as promoted in New Zealand) so as "to ensure children develop an understanding of their roles as future citizens of a bilingual and multi-cultural society" (p.6).

2.24 In summary, therefore, the stated rationale for introducing the Foundation Phase was a concern that the current overly formal curriculum and pedagogy was inappropriate for young children and may be detrimental to their later learning and attainment. In line with effective early years programmes found across Europe and beyond, more formal approaches should be delayed and progressively introduced only when children are developmentally ready. Active, play-based approaches to learning in both indoor and outdoor environments should support the development of children's language and thinking skills, for example, and their positive dispositions to learning. The Foundation Phase curriculum would result from the adaption and integration of the Desirable Outcomes with the programmes of study and focus statements in the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum.

2.25 The Foundation Phase proposed a new approach to the teaching and learning of young children in Wales that could be considered to be radical in terms of pedagogy and new in terms of the focus on children's individual development. The emphasis on pedagogy was

based on an understanding and interpretation of a number of key educational theories and on the practice and policies in early years education from a number of different countries around the world. As will be demonstrated, the particular way the Foundation Phase developed in Wales meant that there was no *a priori* design or model for this new approach or curriculum. To some extent this was implicit in the concerns about the previous Key Stage 1 and the underlying rationale for the new Foundation Phase. However, in order to fully understand what the Foundation Phase is, how it is intended to be delivered, and hence how it should be evaluated, this approach needs to be made explicit. We refer to this as the programme theory for the Foundation Phase, which we believe underpins much of the policy logic model (see Figure 2). Consequently, the report now attempts to develop this programme theory before proceeding to outline the remaining elements (*inputs, processes and activities*) of the Foundation Phase.

3 Building a Programme Theory for the Foundation Phase

- 3.1 Given the preceding rationale for the Foundation Phase, it is useful to outline two broad theoretical positions that are inherent to the western early years tradition: 'constructivist' and 'sociocultural'. While these theories often sit side-by-side within early years programmes, they represent different views about how children construct meaning, and significantly, how adults may best support children. While constructivists emphasise the individual construction of meaning through action on the world, socio constructivists maintain that this cannot be achieved without others – it is a social process. Sociocultural theory shares this focus on the 'social' although emphasising the importance of shared activity within particular contexts and cultures. For this report, as Anning et al. (2009), we use the term 'sociocultural' to incorporate a broad range of linked theories that emphasise the 'social' including socio constructivism.

The Early Years Tradition

- 3.2 Early years programmes in the western world, to a greater and lesser extent, resonate with ideas proposed by the 'early years pioneers'. The construct of the child within the early years tradition is in opposition to the Puritan Child tainted by original sin and in need of discipline (see James and James 2008); to John Locke's child as a 'blank slate' (tabula rasa) in need of instruction and guidance; and to the poor child of the Elementary Tradition, whose education was focused on passivity and obedience (Smith 1931) a narrowly defined curriculum (the '3Rs'), traditional (drill and practice) teaching methods and firm discipline. The key ideas of the most celebrated pioneers are briefly described below.
- 3.3 Part of the German Romantic movement, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) maintained children learn through their senses and through the consequences of their actions rather than through adult

intervention and punishment. For Rousseau, childhood was and should be preserved as a time of innocence. While drawing on Rousseau's ideas, Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827) wanted to see how these could be implemented in practice. He believed in educating the whole child and maintained that children should be allowed to follow their own interests and draw their own conclusions. He wanted children to engage in practical activity, and to develop their powers of observation and reasoning rather than memorising 'meaningless words'. Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) attended Pestalozzi's training institute but was an idealist and saw true education as founded on religion and nature. He believed children were born good and learned through experience and free self-activity; through play, children, like God, were inventive and creative. The kindergarten was therefore a place in which children could grow and develop in harmony with nature.

- 3.4 Maria Montessori (1870-1952), who worked in a poor inner-city community in Rome, saw the house as a metaphor for early education. Children in mixed age classes were free to choose activities but this was from a range of structured and potentially instructive materials or tasks in a prepared environment that emphasised, for example, beauty, harmony and order. A social reformer working in the slums of Deptford, Margaret McMillan (1860-1931) transformed a derelict site into an outdoor nursery in order to improve children's health and support their development through, for example, play and cultivating vegetables. Susan Isaacs (1885-1948) ran an experimental school for highly advantaged children in Cambridge aged two and a half to seven – the Malting House School – which aimed to support a childhood and education based on self-discovery and scientific enquiry with few limits on children's freedom. Finally, John Dewey (1859-1952) an American philosopher who was concerned with democracy and social reform, reacted against the idea of education as being concerned with the rote learning of facts and established subjects. Rather, he maintained, children should be allowed to learn through direct experience in ways that also support their sense of being part of a democratic community.

3.5 In different ways and for different purposes, then, the pioneers all supported 'child-centred' education which, in broad terms, sees the child as intrinsically curious and capable; values free play and first-hand learning which stems from individual children's interests and cuts across subject boundaries; and views the teacher as guide and facilitator rather than as instructor (Kwon, 2002). In western societies, this tradition, drawing on a *constructivist theory* of learning, arguably underpins what is still seen by many practitioners today as 'good' early years education.

The Developing Child

3.6 Constructivist ideas about learning have their roots in the theories of Jean Piaget – even though his primary concern was children's development and not their education. Piaget saw thought as internalised action (e.g. Piaget and Inhelder 1969) and divided cognitive development – the development of logical thought – into a number of discrete stages that determine and constrain how the child makes sense of the world. Progress through these stages – for example, the development from the simple and concrete to the more complex and abstract – is seen as largely dependent on the child's active exploration of and experimentation on the world (learning through cause and effect) and the processes of assimilation and accommodation of new experiences, triggered by a sense of disequilibrium between new and existing understandings. In this way it has been argued that learning is motivated by an attempt to regain cognitive equilibrium (Siegler 1998).

3.7 According to constructivist theories, then, children make meaning through acting on the world⁵, through building on what they already know (the development of increasing complex schema). It is generally

⁵ According to DeVries (1997) the role Piaget attributed to social interaction in children's development may have been under-emphasised.

assumed therefore that development leads learning. Constructivist teachers provide resources and activities that are appropriate to the child's current stage of development, support their play and active learning, their investigative and problem solving skills and monitor their 'readiness' to move on to the next stage. It has been suggested that as a result of the power of the early years tradition, play may be seen by Foundation Phase practitioners as something belonging to the child: it is the child's way of making sense of the world and something with which teachers should not interfere (Maynard and Chicken 2010).

- 3.8 Walkerdine (1990) refers to the intertwining of the two discourses of child-centred pedagogy and developmental psychology with its focus on the individual child. 'Child development theory' – which underpins the idea of 'developmentally appropriate' practice – has been extensively criticised (e.g. Dahlberg et al. 2006). Burman (2007) for example, states that within this theory learning tends to be portrayed as narrow, linear and measurable; the universal as opposed to unique child progresses through a series of stages – a ladder of competence – with milestones marking what all children of a certain age should be doing, so attempting to shape all children in predetermined ways (O'Loughlin 2009).
- 3.9 Robson (2006) notes that there is considerable scepticism amongst researchers about whether "all development subscribes to a single pattern, across time and across cultures" (2006:16) and that it has been suggested that these theories may marginalise and disadvantage children from particular cultural groups (Cannella 2005). Referring to the work of Siegler (2000), Robson notes that cognitive development is now seen as a "much messier business, typified by the metaphor of a spider's web, or overlapping waves" (Robson 2006:17). Child development theories are not seen to reflect the diversity and significance of children's individual experiences; the complexity of learning; and the variations in children's developmental trajectories.

The Social Child (in a cultural context)

- 3.10 Like constructivist theory, sociocultural theories also view children as active meaning makers but place social interaction as central to children's learning and development and emphasise the role of culture, collaborative activity and interactions with more knowledgeable others (adults or children). Through their actions and interactions in particular contexts, the child is seen to internalise cultural tools such as language and number and to appropriate cultural meanings. It is argued that those working with young children therefore need to understand the families and communities in which children live – they should “take culture seriously” (Brooker 2011:147).
- 3.11 Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (zpd) is of importance here. Vygotsky defined the zpd as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky 1978:86). He maintained “the only good learning is that which is in advance of development” (Vygotsky 1978:89). Teachers can ‘scaffold’ (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976) children's learning⁶; for example, they can provide the child with support in order to work at the level of ‘potential’ development, dismantling the scaffold – or ‘fading’ as the child demonstrates that he or she is capable of completing the task alone (Wood and Wood 1996).
- 3.12 Within the range of ideas that can be identified as sociocultural, Jordan (2009) differentiates between ‘scaffolding’, in which the teacher usually has a clear learning objective, demonstrates and models skills and provides feedback on cognitive skills, and ‘co-construction’. In co-construction, teacher and child are equal and active participants. The teacher does not have a pre-determined content outcome in mind and

⁶ Some of the many, different interpretations of ‘scaffolding’ are described in Daniels (2001).

is willing to follow the child's lead, drawing on his or her own contextual and cultural understandings and experiences and making links "across time and activities" (2009:50). The purpose of co-construction is the creation of shared meaning, but, Jordan maintains, it is more likely to involve children in higher order thinking given their involvement in authentic valued experiences. The idea of 'guided participation' (Rogoff 2003), where learning takes place as a result of a range of authentic activities within particular contexts – some intentional, others not – may be seen as a bridge between co-construction and scaffolding.

- 3.13 Sociocultural theories emphasise the importance of shared action and 'talk', the significance of culture and identify a clear role for the teacher who can scaffold or support – confirm, challenge or extend – children's understanding or thinking – through skilful interactions or 'provocations' (Maynard and Chicken 2010). The emphasis on the appropriation and internalisation of particular attitudes, values and strategies first developed through shared action and interaction, also indicates the power of imitation and of a powerful role for the teacher in modelling particular learning characteristics (see, for example, Claxton 2008).
- 3.14 Resonating with sociocultural perspectives, Claxton and Carr (2004) refer to 'positive learning dispositions: put simply, a 'disposition' is an individual's characteristic way of responding to the environment. Dispositions to learning, many of which are innate, can be strengthened or weakened through teachers' actions and interactions when working with children. Claxton and Carr maintain that if we want children to become better lifelong learners – to strengthen or develop positive dispositions to learning such as confidence, curiosity, tenacity, resilience, playfulness, reciprocity and so on – we need to think about the way teachers work with children.
- 3.15 Claxton and Carr (2004) differentiate between a 'prohibiting' environment in which children's choices and behaviour are tightly controlled; an 'affording' environment which provides opportunities for

the development of positive learning dispositions but these are not emphasised or valued; an 'inviting' environment where the chance to ask questions, for example, is clearly valued; and a 'potentiating' (powerful) environment in which positive dispositions are actively stretched and developed often through shared experiences in which children as well as adults take responsibility for directing activities.

3.16 As indicated above, it is maintained that competent learners should be afforded opportunities to choose between activities and experiences that are appropriate to their interests and development and be supported by warm, responsive adults; children should be heard, valued and feel in control. This also relates to the theory of 'self determination'. This theory has gone through a number of revisions but essentially Deci and Ryan (2002) identify three basic psychological needs that support healthy human functioning – allowing the individual to reach his or her potential. These are:

- competence (feeling effective in one's ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities)
- relatedness (feeling connected to others, having a sense of belonging with other individuals and with one's communities)
- autonomy (feeling comfortable with one's behaviour).

3.17 Deci and Ryan (2002) indicate the need to support children's intrinsic motivation which resonates, also, with Dweck's (2000) work demonstrating that such a focus is vital if children are to develop a 'mastery orientation' towards learning as opposed to 'learned helplessness'. Dweck (2000) maintains the focus should be on learning goals rather than competition and performance goals. The theory of self-determination also emphasises the close link that exists between cognition and emotion. Goleman maintains 'emotional intelligence' refers to "the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in

ourselves and in our relationships” (Goleman 1999:317), thus incorporating self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation and empathy.

Three Early Years Programmes

3.18 We noted above that the Foundation Phase proposals referred to programmes from across Europe and beyond, but particularly emphasised early childhood education in ‘Reggio Emilia’ in Northern Italy, New Zealand (Te Whāriki) and Scandinavia. While drawing to an extent on constructivist theory, these programmes are all underpinned by sociocultural theories – theories that emphasise the significance of, for example, relationships, participation and culture. Aasen and Waters (2006) have argued that if wellbeing is to be placed at the core of the Foundation Phase, then there is a need for policy makers and practitioners to adopt a sociocultural view of the child.

3.19 In describing these three programmes, we draw extensively on the OECD document ‘Five Curriculum Outcomes’, published in 2004, which resulted from a workshop for the national co-ordinators of early childhood policy hosted in Stockholm in 2003. Within the OECD report, the description of Reggio Emilia was based on notes by Dr Carlina Rinaldi; information about Te Whāriki was based on a presentation by Professor Helen May; and the Swedish curriculum was described by Professor Ingrid Pramling.

Reggio Emilia

3.20 Reggio Emilia is an area in northern Italy that is well known for the innovative preschools. Central to this approach is the idea of the child as having rights and who is a competent, active learner ‘continuously building and testing theories about herself and the world around her’ (OECD 2004:12). Relationships are at the heart of education – while children construct their own meaning, this, and the development of a positive self-concept, is supported when the child ‘is surrounded by warm reciprocal relationships’ (OECD 2004:12). The centrality of

relationships – between people and between ideas and the environment – leads to an emphasis on communication and ‘truly listening’ to the child (OECD 2004:12). The focus of practitioners is on the children’s expression and their theories and meaning-making. Young children are encouraged to explore their theories and experiences symbolically representing these through different modes of expression – words, gestures, discussion, mime, movement, drawing, painting and so on – the hundred languages of children.

3.21 Reggio Emilia supports an emergent curriculum, determined by children in collaboration with each other and their teachers, that is conceived of as a journey or a voyage of discovery (OECD 2004:13); there are no planned goals or standards as these would “push schools towards teaching without learning” (Malaguzzi 1993). Teachers are co-learners or co-researchers, a resource and a guide. Teachers carefully listen to observe and ‘document’ children’s work and the “growth of community in the classroom” (OECD 2004:15) provoking, co-constructing and stimulating thinking and children’s collaboration with peers. Environment is seen as important: the third teacher. Documentation provides a visible memory of what children have done and said; provides insight into children’s learning processes; and provides parents and the community with information about what happens in school.

Te Whāriki

3.22 Te Whāriki is a framework for supporting the learning and development of children aged from birth to six years in New Zealand. Against a background of developing a continuity of learning from birth to tertiary education, the New Zealand government published a tender for an early childhood curriculum. Concerned about the possible development of a ‘school-type curriculum’ with pre-defined skills and knowledge or a “developmental psychology framework” (OECD 2004:16) based on intellectual, emotional, social and physical development, Helen May and Margaret Carr of the University of Waikato, submitted a proposal.

This was accepted and following broad consultation (including parents) Te Whāriki was developed with family/parent/community links and Māori Language and culture as its main pillars.

- 3.23 Te Whāriki translates as a ‘woven mat’ for all to stand on and this is seen as a metaphor that represents its inclusivity of multiple perspectives, cultures and approaches. It is a framework of agreed principles and approaches that are underpinned by a sociocultural approach based on a desire to nurture children’s learning dispositions promote bi-culturalism and reflect the realities of children’s lives. The guiding principles of the framework are that it should: reflect the holistic development of children; promote children’s empowerment; strengthen family and community links; promote learning through responsive and reciprocal relationships.
- 3.24 The five key strands for learners are wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration. Three to four broad goals are identified for each strand. These relate, for example to the nurturing of children’s emotional wellbeing, knowing the limits of acceptable behaviour; developing verbal communication skills for a range of purposes and experiencing the cultures’ stories and symbols and valuing play, including spontaneous play. Goals and strands are further developed with suggested or possible learning outcomes, most of which are broad and holistic.

The Swedish Curriculum

- 3.25 The preschool curriculum is situated within a system of decentralisation and deregulation. While the state determines the overall goals and guidelines, municipalities and practitioners take responsibility for its implementation. Preschools are encouraged to work on all aspects of child development – their social and emotional development and their learning – including stimulating an interest in written language and mathematics – as well as focusing on ‘values and norms’. Learning is seen as grounded in play, social interaction, exploration, and creativity,

as well as through observation, discussion and reflection. It is noted that language, learning and identity are closely inter-related and children create meaning – the central focus of learning – through communication and play. The child is seen to construct his or her own meaning with the implication that learning has to be made appropriate to the individual child. However, the way in which this meaning is made is also dependent on the whole child and within a particular context.

3.26 The Swedish curriculum outlines five groups of goals that incorporate: an understanding of common democratic values, respect for others and justice and equality; the adoption of a pedagogical approach that combines care, nurturing and learning through activities that stimulate play, creativity and joyful learning; the promotion of democracy and involves children being given growing responsibility for their actions and the environment; cooperation between the preschool and home.

3.27 Preschools should ensure children develop, for example: a secure and positive self-concept; the ability to listen and express their views; their vocabulary, ability to play with words and interest in the written language; life skills such as cooperative skills, initiative, flexibility, reflectivity, problem solving skills, creativity; and subject-specific goals focused on particular areas of learning (OECD 2004:23). Assumptions underpinning learning include an acknowledgement that the child experiences every situation in a unique way; that there is a need to support children in choosing and setting their own goals for learning; that children create new meaning in communication with other people or the world; that exposing children to diversity helps them to realise there are other ways of thinking and doing; and that learning is a lifelong process (OECD 2004:24).

Comment

3.28 The early years pioneers were united in their promotion of an approach – child-centred education – that focused on supporting what were seen

as children's 'natural' ways of being and meaning-making: how they view the world. The early years tradition, associated with constructivist theory, may reflect a common view amongst current practitioners about what constitutes a 'good' early years education and therefore have implications for the way in which they work with children.

3.29 The early years programmes of Reggio Emilia, New Zealand and Sweden may draw on constructivist theory but emphasise sociocultural perspectives – there is a particular focus on the significance of, for example, talk, relationships, wellbeing and social and emotional development; of seeing children as capable learners; of children being 'at home' within particular communities; and on developing skills and dispositions that enable them to become lifelong learners. It should be noted that these programmes have emergent (Reggio Emilia) or 'light touch' frameworks/curricula (New Zealand, Sweden).

3.30 Constructivist pedagogies may be criticised for a general lack of adult intervention; sociocultural pedagogies may be criticised in that they do not perceive the need for more formal or systematic early intervention (direct teaching) in relation to the development of literacy and numeracy skills – particularly for those young children who have not experienced a positive home learning environment.

4 The Foundation Phase: The Programme Theory

- 4.1 In this chapter we attempt to establish the Foundation Phase programme theory through an analysis of the Foundation Phase documentation. This provides what might be described as the official policy discourse for the Foundation Phase. The evaluation will be interested in the extent to which this ‘official’ description of the Foundation Phase, i.e. how it is perhaps intended, differs from the understanding and practice of the Foundation Phase amongst practitioners and other stakeholder groups.
- 4.2 The purpose of identifying the programme theory is to help to identify the underpinning approach, suggested pedagogy, statutory curriculum and associated outcomes of the Foundation Phase. In turn this contributes to the development and better understanding of the Foundation Phase policy logic model. Again, it is not the intention of this analysis to evaluate the Foundation Phase’s programme theory but in analysing the official documentation we do attempt to ascertain the *clarity* of explanations and *coherence* of ideas and terminology both within and across documents, and, in light of recent research, to note where there may now be some limitations to the original interpretation of educational theories and evidence that were used to underpin the Foundation Phase.
- 4.3 Having outlined the procedure, we first consider the *underpinning approach* and suggested *pedagogy*. For the purposes of this report, we have stretched the term ‘pedagogy’ to include all that practitioners do to enable learning to take place. We then provide a summary of findings relating to *curriculum content* and *outcomes*.

The Methodology

4.4 In keeping with qualitative analysis, the procedure was multi-layered, iterative and reflexive (Srivastava and Hopwood 2009): that is, documents were analysed on numerous occasions and in different ways to enable us to clarify, check and re-check emerging issues and meanings within and across the documentation and to reconsider and question our initial assumptions. It broadly resonates with the approach advocated by Ritchie and Spencer (2002).

- i. The documents to be analysed were identified (the core documentation distributed to Foundation Phase practitioners) and the situation in which the documents were generated – the political and cultural context – was considered. At this stage the aim was to gain familiarity with the range and diversity of the documents to be analysed.
- ii. A framework was developed. The ‘framework’ identified the key ideas, underpinning theories and indicative vocabulary associated with two broad theoretical approaches related to those identified in Chapter 3: ‘the developing child’ (constructivist) and ‘the social child’ (sociocultural) (see Appendix A).
- iii. An initial analysis was made of the ‘Foundation Phase Framework’; ‘Play/Active Learning’; ‘Learning and Teaching Pedagogy’ and ‘Observing Children’. The framework was used as a heuristic device; it supported our judgements within and across the documentation concerning meanings, relevance, significance, connections, clarity and coherence.
- iv. The same documents were re-analysed in relation to key issues emerging from the initial analysis along with those highlighted in The Learning Country (NAfW 2001a) and the Foundation Phase consultation document. These were:

- The underpinning approach – what is meant by ‘developmental’/‘child-centred’?
 - Associated ‘pedagogy’: interpretation of the nature and scope of ‘Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity’; play; the role of the practitioner (what is meant by a ‘balance’ between practitioner-directed and child-initiated activities?); observation; outdoor learning; and partnerships with parents/carers.
- v. As the issue of ‘balance’ between child-initiated and practitioner-directed learning remained unclear, we examined the *Foundation Phase National Training Pack Module on Experiential Learning in Practice*. Additional information on outdoor learning was ascertained through an exploration of the *Outdoor Learning Handbook*.
- vi. A final analysis of this documentation was undertaken in order to explore and compare the meanings and definitions of some of the key terminology that had been described in the Pilot evaluation (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2005) as lacking clarity. These were: play, free play, structured play, active learning and positive learning dispositions.
- vii. In relation to curriculum, the *Foundation Phase Framework* and associated guidance documents for each of the seven Areas of Learning (AoL), Desirable Outcomes and the National Curriculum for Key Stage 1 were interrogated in order to ascertain:
- Whether the approach and pedagogy outlined in the findings to date were reflected in these documents; and whether reference to thinking skills, the use of ICT and *Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig* was included in these documents.
 - The alignment of the introductory focus statements; the skills and range statements; and information provided in the guidance documents (including progress statements).

- The alignment between the Foundation Phase outcomes, DO and KS1 outcomes.

The Documents

4.5 To summarise, the following documents were analysed:

- The Foundation Phase Framework for Children’s Learning for 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales (2008)
- Learning and Teaching Pedagogy (2008)
- Play/Active Learning (2008)
- Observing Children (2008)
- The guidance documents for each area of the seven Areas of Learning (all 2008)
- The Outdoor Learning Handbook (2009)
- Foundation Phase National Training Pack Module on ‘Experiential Learning in Practice’ (2007)
- ‘Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning before Compulsory School Age’ (ACCAC 1996)
- ‘Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum in Wales’ (ACCAC 2003)
- Skills Framework for 3 to 19 year olds in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government 2008).

The acronyms used for these documents are listed in Table 1.

The Underpinning Approach of the Foundation Phase

4.6 The Foundation Phase Framework is built around the developmental needs and progress of individual children. The origins of this appear to lie in Desirable Outcomes (DO) (1996) and the Hanney Report (2001)⁷. For example, DO notes that good quality early years education “contributes to the all-round growth of every child” (1996:3) and

⁷ A commitment to this approach may also have been supported by Jane Davidson’s observations of early years policy in Cuba (see Barton 2002).

emphasises the “Principles of Appropriateness” that “must underpin education for the under-fives” (see below). Similarly, in her report for the Welsh Assembly’s Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, Hanney (NAfW 2001b) maintained that early years provision in Wales (for children from birth to 3-years-old) should be based on an “appropriate, developmental curriculum which is in harmony with the child’s particular needs and interests” (NAfWb 2001:3). The Framework reflects and builds on this principle; it states that at the centre of the statutory curriculum framework “lies the holistic development of children and their skills across the curriculum” with “the child at the heart of any planned curriculum” (p.5).

Table 1: Documents Analysed and Acronyms Used

Documents	Acronym
The Foundation Phase Framework	F
<i>Guidance</i>	
Learning and Teaching Pedagogy	L&T
Play/Active Learning	P/A
Observing Children	OBS
Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity	PSDWCD
Language, Literacy and Communication Skills	LLC
Mathematical Development	MD
Welsh Language Development	WLD
Knowledge and Understanding of the World	KUW
Physical Development	PD
Creative Development	CD
Outdoor Learning Handbook	OLH
Foundation Phase National Training Pack Module on Experiential Learning in Practice	ELP
Skills Framework for 3-19 Year Olds	SF
<i>Previous curricula</i>	
Desirable Outcomes	DO
Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum in Wales	NC

- 4.7 Resonating with constructivist theory, there is an emphasis on learning as a continuum and the importance of recognising and building on children's previous needs, interests and prior experiences – what they already know and can do, their interests and what they understand (F, p.6) including those in the home environment (L&T p.6, p. 24). 'Schema theory' (based on the work of Chris Athey 1990 and developed by Cathy Nutbrown 2011) is mentioned: that by repeating a learning experience, children develop schema or patterns of thoughts that are strengthened until they are able to make connections (L&T p.9). Similarly, it is noted that children should also be given opportunities to practise, repeat, consolidate and review their work (L&T p.9, p.18) in order to "make connections" between new experiences and previous learning (L&T p.30).
- 4.8 Emphasis is placed on the individual child: for example, reference is made to "responding to the needs of individuals" (L&T p.26) and: "Consider individual needs and take these into account" (L&T p.16). Closely aligned to the DO "principles of appropriateness" (DO p.4), there is a recognition that children move along the learning continuum at different rates (F p.5) within different areas of development (L&T p.11) and that progression is not even: children will go through periods of rapid development and regression (e.g. F p.4). In addition, time is needed for children to practise skills in different situations and reflect on and evaluate their work. Thus, the curriculum should be appropriate to a child's stage of learning "rather than focusing solely on age-related outcomes to be achieved" (F p.4). Children should move on to the next stage of their learning when they are developmentally ready and at their own pace (F p.4).
- 4.9 Given this, it is maintained that practitioners need knowledge of child development in order to plan a curriculum that is appropriate to the individual child's developmental needs and the skills they require in order to become a confident learner (F p.5). In addition, and closely mirroring DO, it is noted that through close observation, practitioners

should be sensitive to any difficulties (physical, sensory, emotional, social or cognitive development) that are “not within an explicit pattern or is completely out of kilter” (L&T p.11) so indicating the need for an additional needs assessment⁸.

4.10 The documentation emphasises children’s entitlement to access a “broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated curriculum that meets their developmental needs” (L&T p.5). In the Foundation Phase this is a holistic curriculum. Reflecting traditional child-centred (constructivist) ideas, it is stated that children “do not compartmentalize their learning and understanding into curriculum areas” (L&T p.5). The Framework thus notes that AoLs should not be approached in isolation (F p.14). The L&T guidance maintains that practitioners may want to undertake discrete planning for each AoL (L&T p.13) but that inevitably there will be connections between the different AoLs as children’s learning and development is interrelated (L&T p.13). Regardless of whether a practitioner’s planning is holistic, discrete or involves a combination of approaches (L&T p.15), it is maintained that PSDWCD should be an integral part of planning across all AoLs.

4.11 While it is noted that children should experience “a variety of teaching and learning styles” (F p.8), in L&T an emphasis is placed on matching approaches to children’s ‘individual’ learning styles. That is, it is maintained that children have preferred ways of interacting with the environment – visual, auditory or kinaesthetic (VAK) and that “opportunities should always be given for children to make choices according to their preferred style” or to “choose through a combination of learning styles” (L&T p.10). Indeed, it is noted that the learning environment should “cater for different learning styles and stages of development” (L&T p.18).

⁸ This approach is supported and strengthened by the FP Child Development Profile (2009). The guidance details broad age ranges relating to each identified stage of development within the areas of personal development, social development, well-being/emotional development, cognitive development and communication skills and physical development. Some of these map on to the FP outcomes and the Progress in Learning statements contained in the related AoL guidance document.

The Pedagogy of the Foundation Phase

4.12 As noted above, for the purposes of this report, 'pedagogy' is broadly defined to include all that practitioners do to enable learning to take place.

Supporting children's Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity (PSDWCD)

4.13 The Framework makes clear that PSDWCD is at the core of the Foundation Phase and should be developed across the curriculum (F p.14; L&T p.5). This appears to resonate with sociocultural perspectives: for example, it is noted that this AoL "concentrates on the development of relationships with peers and adults, the importance of motivation, perseverance, self-esteem and a positive disposition to learning" (L&T p.5). Reference is also made to Goleman's (L&T p.32) work on 'emotional intelligence' (e.g. 1999) and Ferre Laever's work on children's involvement and deep level learning (L&T p.6, p.34).

4.14 Finding ways in which to motivate children to learn – that is intrinsic motivation, in order to build on their "natural curiosity" (L&T p.9) – appears to be a significant aspect of FP pedagogy. Further, while 'empowerment' is seen as a central concept in the FP (see also below), giving children ownership of their learning through for example, providing opportunities for them to be involved in the focus, planning and setting up of indoor and outdoor play areas (P/A p.7) is seen as a way of increasing children's engagement so as to enhance their learning experiences (L&T p.16)⁹.

4.15 Replicating the text included in the 'Skills Framework' (2008), it is noted that practitioners can develop children's thinking through the processes of "planning, doing and reflecting" although it is emphasised that this

⁹ This appears to relate to 'child-initiated' activities.

should not be seen as a set style of learning and teaching (SF p.10, p.13; L&T p.23; F p.10).

4.16 Further, progression in children's skills across the curriculum can be supported by opportunities for children to engage in *structured play activities* (L&T p.18) that involve experimenting, predicting, problem solving (P/A p.46) and, reflecting the approach of Reggio Emilia, through talking and discussing, 'expressing their ideas in multiple ways' (L&T p.18). This is seen to support – to 'nurture' – children's creativity¹⁰ (P/A p.34), their emotional wellbeing (e.g. L&T p.27) and also the development of children's thinking (L&T p.35).

4.17 Cultural diversity and the development of the Welsh language are not emphasised in the L&T and P/A documents, but are explicitly addressed in the PSDWCD guidance document.

Play

4.18 Play, and an understanding of what is meant by play, appears central to the Foundation Phase. DO describes the fundamental importance of the "serious business" of play to children's development and learning and this is noted (almost verbatim) in the Framework document (F p.4, p.6). Developmental stages of play, different 'types' of play/active learning, and the role of the practitioner are detailed in the Play/Active Learning document (P/A p.13-19).

4.19 Through play, children are able to learn through "first-hand experiential activities" (F p.4). By 'play' P/A states it is referring to children's "active involvement in their learning"; in the glossary 'active learning' is defined as "being active and involved in their learning" (P/A p.52) thereby implying, and resonating with Piagetian theory, that children need to be physically as well as cognitively engaged. This appears to be reinforced by the statement: "The curriculum and the environment

¹⁰ These descriptions of creativity may be more attuned to 'creative thinking' (see Robson, 2006).

should be structured to enable children to be active learners” (P/A p.7) – e.g. select their own materials, experiment with resources and try to solve problems.

4.20 The value of play (that is, playing and talking as part of their play, P/A p.6) in supporting young children’s development and learning is acknowledged and explained, as are the different types of play/active learning areas and activities (P/A p.24, p.37). It is noted, also, that it is vital that there are “clear aims for children’s learning” (P/A p.7) as “it is all too easy for ‘play’ to be misconstrued as trivial and purposeless” (P/A p.5) and that “Careful observations of the planned curriculum and how children respond to it should provide evidence of whether the children are focused on their learning and not *playing aimlessly*” (L&T p.38). For play to be ‘effective’, therefore – that is, effective in supporting appropriate learning – careful planning is essential (P/A p.5). This appears to resonate with the DO statement that “well structured and purposeful play activities enhance and extend children’s learning” (DO p.3).

4.21 The P/A guidance thus focuses primarily on “structured educational play” (P/A p.5). This is also referred to within P/A as “structured educational play/active learning” (p.4) and “active educational play” (p.8), although the terms “structured play” (L&T p.23), “active, experiential play” (L&T p.9) and “play/active learning” (L&T p.38) are also used in the FP documentation. The glossary definition of “structured educational play” is unclear: “Structured play experiences have specific planned outcomes to extend children’s learning, skills and development. Structured play should be planned with flexibility so as to allow children opportunities to choose and extend an activity according to their interests and knowledge” (e.g. P/A p.57).

4.22 Structured play is differentiated from ‘free’ or ‘spontaneous’ play. P/A notes that in addition to structured play, opportunities should also be provided for children to “follow their own interests and ideas through

free play” (p.5). L&T refers to “planned and spontaneous activities” (L&T p.19) and in P/A it is noted that practitioners should plan the learning environment very carefully to ensure children have a range of play/active learning activities “that allow them to be spontaneous, as well as participating in structured, directed activities” (P/A p. 40). However, how structured and spontaneous play relate to the initiation and direction of activities is fundamental to an understanding of the ‘balance’ that should be achieved between child-initiated and practitioner-directed activities. These issues are therefore examined in greater detail below.

The role of the practitioner – practitioner-directed and child-initiated activities

4.23 One of the key messages in the FP documentation is that there should be a ‘balance’ of practitioner-directed and child-initiated activities (L&T p.10; F p.6)¹¹. However, the documentation refers, also, to the ‘balance’ that should be achieved between activities initiated by the child and those that are ‘initiated’ (rather than directed) by practitioners. This is significant in that these terms (practitioner-initiated and practitioner-directed) appear to relate to different types of play and indicate a different role for the practitioner.

4.24 For example, L&T states that: “There should be a balance of activities that are initiated by a practitioner, including planned, structured play activities, and those initiated by children according to their interests and the resources available” (L&T p.16). This implies that practitioner-initiated activities include structured play as well as direct teaching and that such activities should be balanced with children’s free or spontaneous play.

4.25 At the same time, the FP Framework document notes: There must be a balance between ‘structured learning’ through child-initiated activities and those *directed* by practitioners (F p.6). According to the glossary

¹¹ However, the PSDWCD Guidance maintains that “allowing children to initiate some of their own activities in negotiation with a practitioner” helps to promote high level of involvement and positive dispositions (p.24).

definition of direct teaching (e.g. L&T, 23) practitioner-directed activities (i.e. direct teaching) is differentiated from ‘structured and child-initiated play activities’ (see Figure 3). Thus, ‘practitioner-*initiated* activities’ and ‘practitioner-*directed* activities’ appear to incorporate different forms of play and indicate a different role for practitioners.

Figure 3: Child-initiated and Practitioner-initiated/Practitioner-directed Activity

Child-initiated activity	B A L A N C E	Practitioner- initiated activity
<i>Free spontaneous play</i>		Structured educational play <i>Direct teaching</i>

OR

Child-initiated activity	B A L A N C E	Practitioner- directed activity
<i>Free spontaneous play</i> Structured educational play		<i>Direct teaching</i>

4.26 In relation to the term ‘child-initiated/centred’ the glossary definition lacks precision: “The Foundation Phase curriculum should focus more on children’s interests, development and learning rather than the curriculum and pre-determined outcomes. It is important to note that the ‘planned curriculum’ has to have structure and clear learning objectives but enough flexibility to enable the children to follow their interests and their needs” (L&T p.38).

- 4.27 In order to ascertain what is being suggested in terms of 'balance', then, the Foundation Phase National Training Module on Experiential Learning in Practice', 2007 was examined.
- 4.28 The training pack module (ELP), which is built around the model developed by the Early Excellence Centre (www.earlyexcellence.com), aims to identify what is meant by 'balance' across all the elements of learning and teaching (ELP p.5) within an "appropriate child-centred curriculum" (ELP p.6). It refers to three ways of structuring the planned curriculum: continuous provision, enhanced provision and focused tasks (ELP p.9): these relate to a segmented triangle with continuous provision at its base, then enhanced provision then focused tasks.
- 4.29 *Continuous provision* is what is *provided* for in terms of learning opportunities (ELP p.10): areas set up and resourced so practitioners know what learning is taking place during play (ELP p.25). Adult involvement in children's play within these areas – that is, playing *alongside* children (ELP p.58) – is crucial "to model how to play in each area, promote/extend learning" (ELP p.39). Practitioners also need to observe children to determine their interests, needs and where they are in their learning, what is working well and what needs to be enhanced/altered (ELP p.39). However, it notes, child-initiated learning is about the children playing and having fun, it is not about completing tasks (ELP p.79).
- 4.30 *Enhanced provision* is how practitioners *enhance, enrich and extend* children's learning (ELP p.10); it is where the adult introduces new ideas and resources, role modelling possibilities and providing time for exploration (ELP p.58). It is maintained that continuous and enhanced provision ensure children have time to explore, investigate, practice and consolidate their learning and understanding, follow and develop their interests, take risks in a non-threatening environment and re-visit skills and concepts until they have made the connections necessary for understanding (ELP p.6).

4.31 *Focused tasks* are specific, planned tasks – the direct teaching of skills/concepts/knowledge – where the adult is leading the learning (ELP p.49) and where the learning is measured: assessment ‘of’ and assessment ‘for’ learning (ELP p.5).

4.32 While all three elements interact – one leading to another (ELP p.50) – it is maintained that this is a bottom up approach: balance should reflect the triangle with continuous provision at its broad base (ELP p.14) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Curriculum Development Model (ELP Powerpoint Slide 93)



4.33 The term ‘child-initiated’ may therefore relate to what within this Training Pack is termed ‘continuous provision’ – where children ‘spontaneously’ play with (structured) resources that have planned learning objectives – while ‘structured play opportunities’ (structured educational play), planned in response to cues from children (L&T

p.22), may relate to 'enhanced provision'. 'Structured educational play' has specific planned outcomes to extend children's learning, skills and development (L&T p.43). Even so, as noted above, children should not be made to pursue a particular activity (L&T p.6), or be discouraged from developing their own ideas (P/A p.43), as they will stop playing (P/A p.43). In this way, structured educational play also allows for children to be spontaneous.

The role of the practitioner in child-initiated learning

4.34 Within child-initiated play, the practitioner's role appears to be one of 'facilitator' of children's learning – described as "central to FP pedagogy" (L&T p.26). As facilitator, the practitioner responds to the needs of individuals and is willing to learn alongside the children (L&T p.26). This may be particularly the case with child-initiated activities (continuous provision) but also with structured educational play (enhanced provision). L&T notes "A role-play activity might require interactive participation to extend language skills, with the practitioner and child involved together in the activity" (L&T p.23) and that "cognitive and social skills can be enhanced when the practitioner and child engage in solving a problem together" (L&T p.23).

4.35 This links with the concept of 'co-construction' – where "each party engages with the understanding of the other" (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002:5) as part of sustained shared thinking (L&T p.35). L&T notes, for example, that a 'structured play situation' (continuous or enhanced learning) may require intervention with additional resources or suggestions to extend thinking and move the play on and that the practitioner "should recognise when to intervene sensitively in play and when to allow children to continue without support until they reach their own conclusions" (L&T p.24)¹². The skills of making this judgement are developed through observing children and understanding children's development (OBS p.14).

¹² This closely draws on the DO page 3 and is also noted in the Framework page 6.

4.36 The sociocultural idea of ‘scaffolding’ is also promoted. Resonating with the Vygotskian idea of the zpd (see 3.11), L&T notes that practitioners can work alongside one or a small group of children, and “scaffold learning by providing additional resources, making suggestions or asking open-ended questions that challenge and extend thinking” (L&T p.22). It is maintained that scaffolding is particularly important when children are struggling with an activity or when they will not succeed without practitioner intervention.

4.37 However, a general commitment to ‘intervention’ may be challenged by the statement: “Children’s learning is most effective when it arises from first-hand experiences, whether spontaneous or structured, and when they are given time to play without interruptions and to reach a satisfactory conclusion” (P/A p.5). This statement is more resonant with a constructivist approach to pedagogy.

Direct teaching

4.38 The L&T guidance notes that there will be times when direct teaching of a new skill will be required through a planned activity with a small group (Foundation Phase National Training Module on Experiential Learning in Practice, 2007 suggest that direct teaching can take place with whole group, small group, pairs and individuals). A “directed teaching activity may include demonstrations of new skills and clear explanations of information” (L&T p.23). In direct teaching, learning outcomes should be shared with children and they should be encouraged to discuss their work in order to introduce an element of self-evaluation (L&T p.23).

4.39 Thus while ‘continuous provision’ may be underpinned by constructivist theory, ‘enhanced provision’ is essentially underpinned by sociocultural theories. ‘Focused tasks’, involving direct teaching, may also draw on sociocultural theories – scaffolding, modelling and demonstrating – or

encompass behaviourist ideas of highly structured and sequenced learning or drill and practice (see Table 2, which builds on Figure 3).

Table 2: Differentiation between Child-initiated, Practitioner-initiated and Practitioner-directed Approaches

	Child-initiated activity	Practitioner-initiated activity	Practitioner-directed activity
Type of provision	Continuous provision	Enhanced provision	Focused tasks
Play/tasks	Free play (within a structured learning environment)	Structured play	Specific tasks
Objectives and/or outcomes	Planned objectives	Planned outcomes – but flexibility	Planned outcomes
Who leads/directs the activity	Child-led	Child-led or practitioner-led	Practitioner-directed
Role of practitioner	To facilitate	To facilitate, co-construct guide/scaffold model/demonstrate	To guide/scaffold/model/demonstrate/‘teach’ (may include drill and practice)
Related theory	Constructivist theory	Sociocultural theories	Sociocultural/behaviourist theories

4.40 It may be significant, however, that this complex unpacking of what may be meant by the terms ‘child-initiated’, ‘practitioner-initiated’ and ‘practitioner-directed’ activities, and how each of these relates to key aspects of the practitioner’s role and work and different forms of play, required a detailed examination of a wide range of Foundation Phase documents alongside a sound understanding of educational theory.

4.41 Three other issues are highlighted as particularly important within the FP framework: observation, outdoor play and the relationship with parents/carers. Observation is an integral daily part of the practitioner's role and is used to monitor, for example, the children's concentration, dispositions to learning, social interactions, independence, strengths and abilities across all AoLs and areas of development and to identify any additional learning needs (L&T p.33). In addition to routine observations, observations may be undertaken for a specific purpose such as evaluating the use of a structured play activity (L&T p.22) or focusing on the attainment of pre-determined outcomes (OBS p.4). Observations can involve practitioners taking an active role in an activity (OBS p.4). Not all observations have a predetermined aim; the aim may result from observing (OBS p.4). However, the main purpose of observation is "to know where children are on the learning continuum in order to move them along, identify any difficulties, misinterpretations or misunderstandings" (OBS p.6).

4.42 In line with early pioneers such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel and McMillan, and approaches to early education found in Scandinavia, the use of the outdoor learning environment is emphasised across the documentation: it is maintained that this should be an extension of the indoor learning environment and that as far as is possible, children should be able to move freely between the indoors and outdoors throughout the day (PA p.55; L&T p.41). The Outdoor Learning Handbook (2009) (OLH) refers to Forest Schools, an approach originating in Scandinavia, and also emphasises the value of using the outdoor environment in relation to, for example: improving health and fitness; allowing children to experience nature at first hand, problem solve as part of authentic experiences and gain first experience of conservation, sustainability and a love of nature (OLH p.2).

4.43 The Foundation Phase Framework also emphasises the importance of developing positive partnerships with parents/carers who are recognised as the child's first educators (F p.4; L&T p.5; P/A p.3). It is

stated that this may be achieved through inviting information about children's interests; sharing information about learning activities; discussing children's development; and consulting on children's progress (L&T p.24). The primary purpose of this partnership appears to be to ensure continuity of provision between the home and setting/school (L&T p.12)¹³.

Summary and comment

4.44 The approach underpinning the Foundation Phase is explicitly developmental with a clear focus on the individual child. Development is seen as essentially linear, although not tied to chronological age, and recognises individual variations in rate within and across all areas of development and learning. The child's progress, achievements and needs in this respect, along with, for example, his or her interests, should be the focus of the practitioner's observations and evaluations and inform the practitioner's planning. This may be challenging while, as noted above, these ideas have been critiqued by those who adopt sociocultural perspectives.

4.45 As developmental theory is intertwined with constructivist theory, there are resonances, for example, with the construction of schema and also with the idea of 'readiness'. The establishment of 'continuous provision' which, it is suggested in the Foundation Phase National Training Module on Experiential Learning in Practice, is the foundation of children's development and learning and which allows for children's spontaneous play within structured learning environments, also resonates with constructivist ideas.

¹³ That parents/carers are partners in ways that resonate with approaches in Reggio Emilia for example, is challenged in the Physical Development guidance (2008) that suggests practitioners should, for example, encourage parents/carers to provide suitable opportunities for physical play at home; join out-of-school clubs and holiday schemes to extend their interest in physical activities and sports; participate in home tasks that promote physical skills and be aware of the importance of healthy eating (p.9). This resonates more with the idea of 'early intervention'.

4.46 While constructivism is apparent, also, in relation to the role of the teacher as facilitator, overall, an important role is indicated for the practitioner in supporting children's learning and development. This resonates with sociocultural theories. Indeed, ideas and terminology from sociocultural theories are emphasised throughout the documentation: for example, the importance of communication, expression and creativity and the promotion of guided learning and scaffolding as pedagogical strategies (particularly in relation to enhanced learning). Reference is also made to 'the disposition to learn' (e.g. L&T 6, 9, 10). However, this (singular) 'disposition' is described in the glossary as synonymous with a positive attitude to learning and is differentiated from, for example, 'curiosity' and 'perseverance', two of the many positive 'dispositions' that may support lifelong learning. This indicates a more simplistic interpretation than is generally found in the literature.

4.47 Further, it appears that while sociocultural terms such as 'empowerment'¹⁴, 'ownership' and 'participation' are used, the primary (although not sole) function of attending to children's agency is not to do with children's rights or personal growth, but to promote children's engagement in their learning. Similarly while a play-based approach is advocated, the intrinsic value of play – for example, as related to children's enjoyment and quality of life (Powell 2009) – appears to be secondary to its role in supporting effective learning.

4.48 Nor is it clear whether 'partnerships' with parents/carers are genuinely bi-directional as emphasised in, for example, Te Whāriki and Reggio Emilia; arguably, they are seen more as a way of supporting children's learning in the school/setting; as a means of improving the home learning environment; or even as regulation of home values/practices (see footnote 13). The emphasis on 'participation' or of recognising the 'funds of knowledge' embedded within local communities (see Moll and

¹⁴ Vision into Action (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006) indicates that children should be 'empowered' to achieve social and economic wellbeing.

Greenberg 1990) as indicated within The Learning Country (NAfW 2001a) may not be fully realised within the documentation (see below).

4.49 That the Foundation Phase draws on both constructivist and sociocultural ideas is not in itself unusual. However, although both indicate the adoption of play-based active learning, these theories reflect very different ideas about how children learn and how this learning is best supported. An initial challenge for practitioners may be in identifying what is meant by terminology that is central to the suggested pedagogy – such as (but not limited to) ‘structured play’, ‘active learning’ and ‘child-initiated’ and ‘practitioner-directed’ learning. The ‘concern and confusion’ caused by these and other terms were noted in the pilot evaluation project report (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2005: 81).

4.50 Further confusion may be related to determining the suggested ‘balance’ between child-initiated and practitioner-directed learning; in this respect the ELP does not appear to be aligned with the approach promoted in the L&T and P/A guidance. Research with early years practitioners in Wales suggests that supporting child-initiated learning may be challenging, requiring practitioners to relinquish control, develop new cognitive skills and reconstruct their view of the child and role of the teacher (Maynard and Chicken 2010). It is unclear, also, how this balance should be adjusted as children progress through the Foundation Phase and particularly within children’s final year in the Foundation Phase.

4.51 Similarly, research with Foundation Phase practitioners in Wales has suggested that while the outdoor environment appears to support the adoption of more open and responsive pedagogical approaches, there may be a resistance to taking children outside and little understanding of the practitioners’ role when working in the outdoor learning environment (see Maynard et al. 2013).

4.52 There are a small number of discrepancies given recent developments in neuroscience and its application to education. That is, documents refer to a number of ‘neuromyths’ – ideas that have gained acceptance in popular culture (and schools) but which are not based on valid evidence. First, advances in neuroscience have confirmed the ‘plasticity’ of the brain – that it is able to continuously change in response to environmental stimulus (Howard-Jones 2010:201). This has resulted in critical periods for learning particular skills now being seen as ‘sensitive periods’ that are subtle differences in the brain’s ability to be shaped by the environment (e.g. Howard-Jones 2010:26).

4.53 Researchers (Howard-Jones 2010; Geake 2008) also note that there is no evidence that learning can be enhanced through brain training. Nor is there evidence to support the idea of left brain versus right brain thinking or, given our understandings about the connectedness of different brain functions, that benefits can be gained through identifying and presenting material according to children’s perceived ‘learning style’ – visual, auditory or kinaesthetic. These researchers note that the idea of ‘multiple intelligences’ has also been questioned. They point out that studies exploring the educational effectiveness of these ideas in the classroom have failed to show any educational benefits.

The Curriculum of the Foundation Phase

4.54 The 2008 ‘Framework for Children’s Learning’ sets out the curriculum and outcomes for 3-7 year olds in Wales (p.2). The seven statutory Areas of Learning (AoL) are

- i. Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity (PSDWCD)
- ii. Language, Literacy and Communication Skills (LLC)
- iii. Mathematical Development (MD)
- iv. Welsh Language Development (WLD) (in English-medium schools and settings)
- v. Knowledge and Understanding of the World (KUW)

- vi. Physical Development (PD)
- vii. Creative Development (CD)

4.55 These AoLs replicate those in the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning before Compulsory School (DO) (ACCAC 1996) – with Welsh Language Development appearing as an additional discrete area within English-medium schools and settings.

4.56 The Framework is underpinned by the seven core aims for children and young people, developed from the UNCRC, and refers to the non-statutory Skills Framework for children aged 3-19 which has been developed in order to provide guidance on continuity and progression in developing thinking, communication, ICT and number. The commitment to developing and promoting the Welsh language is emphasised.

4.57 At the end of the FP, practitioners are required to assess and report outcomes attained by each child by means of teacher assessment in Personal and Social Development, Wellbeing and Cultural Diversity; Language, Literacy and Communication Skills in either English or Welsh; and Mathematical Development. It is stated that “for information purposes” (F p.43) six outcomes for each AoL are cross-referenced to the current NC level descriptors:

- FP outcome 4 links with NC level 1
- FP outcome 5 links with NC level 2
- FP outcome 6 links with NC level 3

4.58 Notes on our more detailed consideration of the Framework and each of the related guidance documents (these were considered in relation to the Framework AoL introductory focus statements; the skills and range statements; the approach outlined in the related guidance document; the progress in learning section of the guidance document;

and the Framework outcomes) are included in Appendix B. A summary of key issues is provided below.

The alignment with the 'Approach'

4.59 Overall, AoL descriptors reflect the commitment to a developmental approach. This is particularly apparent in LLC/WLD (for example, reference is made to 'reading readiness', 'stages of writing development' are defined, and in PD to the developmental progression of gross and fine motor skills is given). KUW and Creative Development reflect a slightly less developmental approach than other AoLs, focusing more on supporting conceptual development and broad skills. The accuracy of the developmental stages described was not evaluated as part of this study.

The alignment with the 'Pedagogy'

4.60 Within the Framework, AoL descriptors refer to the centrality of active and practical approaches to learning, the importance of talk/communication and of, for example, children expressing their ideas, opinions and feelings. The use of 'child-initiated' activities is referred to in all AoLs other than Mathematical Development. Guidance documents for all AoLs emphasise a commitment to play-based approaches to learning and to a greater or lesser extent the centrality of children's wellbeing and adoption of pedagogical approaches largely aligned to sociocultural ideas (as indicated in the L&T and P/A guidance documents). Placing PSDWCD at the core of the Foundation Phase may support the focus on more open approaches to pedagogy.

Thinking skills, ICT and Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig

4.61 All guidance documents include references to developing children's thinking skills and the use of ICT. References to the Welsh identity and/or the Welsh language are included in all AoLs except for Physical Development; however, it is included in the guidance documentation for this AoL. The provision of Welsh Language Development as a separate AoL within English-medium schools and settings, with skills

and range statements that match LLC may be challenging but reflects a commitment to the development of the Welsh language and a bilingual nation.

The alignment of focus statements, 'skills and range' statements and guidance documents

- 4.62 In the Framework, the introductory text, or focus statements, for each AoL tend to emphasise approaches that may be adopted in the earlier stages of the 'learning continuum', only referring briefly to more complex, higher level skills. For example, in LLC/WLD an emphasis is placed on talking, signing/communicating and listening and in MD on "oral, practical and play activities" (p.23).
- 4.63 'Skills and range' statements within AoLs generally resonate with, or at least do not contradict, the focus statements, but are more explicit in terms of 'content'; this is especially the case at the higher levels of the learning continuum. Examples of these extensions are particularly apparent in MD and in LLC. For example, the LLC focus statement referring to writing, simply notes children should have "a wide range of opportunities to enjoy mark-making and writing experiences" (F p.19). Under 'skills and range', mark-making is given less emphasis than statements referring to, for example, writing in different ways and for different purposes, planning and reviewing writing, punctuation, spelling and handwriting (F p.21b).
- 4.64 Compared with the skills and range statements, the guidance documents are even more explicit in relation to describing children's development and progression in learning as well as subject-related 'content', with further expansions that reflect progress up to the equivalent of level 3 in the National Curriculum. Thus, for example, in LLC, the skills statement "develop their ability to spell common and familiar words in a recognisable way" (F p.21b) is extended to:
- writing each letter of the alphabet

- using their knowledge of sound–symbol relationships and phonological patterns
- recognising and using simple spelling patterns; writing common letter strings within familiar and common words
- spelling commonly occurring simple words
- spelling words with common prefixes and suffixes
- checking the accuracy of their spelling and using word books and dictionaries, identifying initial letters as the means of locating words
- experimenting with the spelling of complex words and discussing misapplied generalisations and other reasons for misspellings
- scrutinising word families

(LLC p.37).

The alignment between the Foundation Phase outcomes, Desirable Outcomes and Key Stage 1 outcomes

4.65 As indicated in the Foundation Phase consultation document (NAfW 2003a), outcomes, AoL ‘skills and range’ statements (which do not always relate to the definition given of ‘skills’ and ‘range’), and the guidance documentation together reflect the ‘stitching together’ of DO and KS1 programmes of study and NC outcomes alongside a developmental and play-based approach to learning that places children’s wellbeing (broadly defined) at its core.

Useful information and support

4.66 It is noted that the ‘useful information and support’ references detailed within the AoL guidance documents are in some cases very dated. For example, the LLC guidance includes two references to books published in the 1970s.

Summary and comment

4.67 The curriculum, as set out in the Framework and guidance documents, reflects both the underpinning approach (developmental) and suggested pedagogy (incorporating constructivist and, in particular,

sociocultural perspectives) as well promoting the development of, for example, ICT skills, thinking skills and *Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig*.

- 4.68 Establishing PSDWCD and WLD as discrete AoLs emphasises their significance within the FP Framework.
- 4.69 While the focus statements may indicate there is to be a 'light touch' in terms of curriculum, the 'skills and range' statements and in particular, the curriculum guidance, demonstrate that expectations in terms of curriculum content and, in particular, outcomes – but not the rate of progression towards these outcomes – remains essentially unchanged. In addition, the level of detail included in relation to particular aspects of LLC and MD indicate that there should be a particular focus on these AoLs.
- 4.70 In order to understand the Foundation Phase (approach, curriculum and pedagogy) it is necessary to examine a range of documents; elements of the programme are distributed across various publications. In the initial proposal document – The Learning Country: Foundation Phase – 3 to 7 years (NAfW, 2003a) – it was noted that there was a need to produce a framework with clear aims and objectives, seen in most European countries “as a way of improving quality and standards” (NAfW 2003a:9). If clear aims and objectives also include clear definitions of key ideas and terminology, this has not been fully realised in the documentation and guidance materials.

5 The Inputs, Processes and Activities of the Foundation Phase

- 5.1 As has been demonstrated, the programme theory underpinning the Foundation Phase contributes in a number of ways. For example, it: helps understand and appreciate the original concerns with the previous Key Stage 1 National Curriculum; it helps to justify the main aims of the Foundation Phase; it provides the main rationale for the Foundation Phase; and directly informs the intended, suggested, approach and pedagogy of the Foundation Phase. It has also been used to help understand the curricular priorities of the Foundation Phase. The report now presents and discusses the remaining key *inputs, processes and activities* that have been utilised in the development and implementation of the Foundation Phase. This includes a summary of the curriculum content of the Foundation Phase that was introduced in the previous chapter. As has been argued earlier, it is helpful to see the inputs and activities outlined in this chapter and the way they contribute to the policy logic model as distinct from the contribution of the underlying programme theory.
- 5.2 The Foundation Phase made statutory the delivery of seven AoLs. The accompanying guidelines strongly reflect a commitment to a developmental approach. They also refer to the centrality of active and practical approaches to learning, children's wellbeing, the importance of talk/communication and of, for example, children expressing their ideas, opinions and feelings: that is, approaches largely aligned to constructivist and in particular to sociocultural ideas. A commitment to sociocultural perspectives is also reflected in the placing of 'Personal and Social Development, Wellbeing and Cultural Diversity' at the heart of the Foundation Phase.
- 5.3 All guidance documents include references to developing children's thinking skills and the use of ICT. The provision of Welsh Language

Development as a separate Area of Learning within English-medium schools and settings, with 'skills and range' statements that match the Language, Literacy and Communication Skills AoL, may be challenging for practitioners but reflects a commitment to the development of the Welsh language and of a bilingual nation.

- 5.4 In the Framework document, the introductory focus statements for each AoL tend to emphasise approaches that may be adopted in the earlier stages of the 'learning continuum', only referring briefly to more complex, higher level skills. This may suggest an emphasis on the development of early conceptual skills across the Foundation Phase and a 'lighter touch' approach to the statutory curriculum.
- 5.5 'Skills and range' statements generally resonate with the focus statements but are more specific in terms of subject-related content; this is especially the case at the higher levels of the learning continuum. Guidance documents are even more explicit in describing children's development and progression in learning as well as 'subject'-related content, with further expansions up to the equivalent of level 3 of the National Curriculum. This is particularly apparent in relation to 'Mathematical Development' and especially 'Language, Literacy and Communication Skills'. This may suggest a particular emphasis should be placed on these AoLs.
- 5.6 Outcomes, AoL 'skills and range' statements, and the guidance documentation, together reflect the proposed 'stitching together' of DOs and Key Stage 1 programmes of study and NC outcomes. Adopting the play-based approach set out in the guidance documents and ensuring individual children make 'steady progress' along the learning continuum in relation to a broad range of specified content – particularly in relation to the detailed and extensive content set out within 'Language, Literacy and Communication Skills' and 'Mathematical Development' – may be challenging for practitioners.

- 5.7 Another key input to the Foundation Phase are the statutory End of Phase Assessments that replace the previous statutory Key Stage 1 assessments. However, these continue to be delivered through teacher assessment.
- 5.8 The major financial investment in the Foundation Phase related to new (higher) adult-to-child ratios:
- 1:8 in nursery and reception classes (age 3-5)
 - 1:15 in Years 1 and 2 (age 5-7).
- 5.9 These higher adult-to-child ratios required the recruitment of additional staff (teaching assistants) in all schools¹⁵.
- 5.10 Another major financial investment in the Foundation Phase was resources for schools to develop their outdoor learning environments. Initially all local authorities were given a capital allocation based on the (Education) General Capital funding formula. They were required to submit their proposal for utilising the grant which was approved by the Welsh Government.
- 5.11 The introduction of the Foundation Phase has also led to the development and resourcing of new training modules and the recruitment of a Training and Support Officer (TSO) in each local authority (to work alongside the respective early years advisors in each local authority). The main aim of the TSOs, usually teachers seconded to the local authority, was to support the development and learning for practitioners in the implementation and development of the Foundation Phase (often through training).
- 5.12 Alongside local authority support and training, the Welsh Government organise annual conferences on the Foundation Phase for head teachers and senior managers and Foundation Phase practitioners.

¹⁵ The non-maintained settings did not receive any financial contribution for staffing as they are already required to operate with a 1:8 ratio.

Each conference tends to focus on a particular theme or set of issues and is repeated across the different regions of Wales.

5.13 The final key input was the introduction of statutory Child Development Assessment Profile (CDAP) that was to be completed for each child within six weeks of entering the Foundation Phase. This was first introduced during 2011/12 in maintained schools only but it should be noted that the statutory requirement to complete these has subsequently been withdrawn following a rapid review (Siraj-Blatchford 2012).

5.14 In 2003 the Welsh Government published a consultation document, *The Learning Country: Foundation Phase 3-7 years*, which provided the basis for a consultation exercise, which led to the publication of an Action Plan and timetable for the roll-out of the Foundation Phase (later to be amended). The original intention was to introduce the Foundation Phase in a number of pilot settings (2004/05) for 3 to 5-year-olds, followed by a final roll-out to all 3 to 5-year-olds in the remaining settings in 2006/07. Prior to the commencement of the pilot phase, development of the Training and Development Plan and a draft Framework for the Foundation Phase were underway.

5.15 The main design and content of the Foundation Phase was developed by the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) between 2003 and until it was later merged in 2006 into the Welsh Assembly Government's new Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS). ACCAC were responsible for producing a draft Framework document for the Foundation Phase and the subsequent guidance documents on each of the seven AoLs. They later produced a guidance document on *Learning and Teaching Pedagogy* for Foundation Phase practitioners.

5.16 The development of later guidance materials was undertaken alongside the implementation and development of the Foundation

Phase in 44 pilot settings (including 22 schools). These 44 settings constituted the original pilot phase for the Foundation Phase (see below).

- 5.17 There would appear to have been little formal guidance available (other than the Foundation Phase consultation document and subsequent Action Plan) when these pilot settings first introduced the Foundation Phase. However, these settings would have been encouraged to use and extend the approaches set out in DOs for Children's Learning before Compulsory School Age (ACCAC 1996). During the first few years a series of workshops and events were organised by ACCAC to work with pilot settings in the development of the Foundation Phase design and content.
- 5.18 The Foundation Phase was first introduced in to 22 schools (and 22 additional funded non-maintained settings) in the school year 2004/05 for children in nursery and reception classes (i.e. children aged 3-5). This was referred to as the Pilot phase of schools and settings. It was later introduced to a further 22 schools (and 22 additional funded non-maintained settings) in the school year 2006/07, again for children in nursery and reception classes. This set of schools and settings are referred to as the Early Start phase. These children, and subsequent year groups, continued to follow the Foundation Phase until the end of Year 2 before continuing on to Key Stage 2 National Curriculum.
- 5.19 The final selection of schools in the Pilot phase was made by the Welsh Government following recommendations made by each local authority in Wales. One school and one funded non-maintained setting were selected from each authority. Despite some initial guidance for the selection of pilot schools by the Welsh Government the method employed by local authorities in selecting schools (and hence by definition, the final sample of pilot schools) is unclear (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2005).

- 5.20 In 2004/05 the Welsh Government funded an evaluation of the first year pilot roll-out (Siraj-Blatchford et. al. 2005).
- 5.21 The Early Start phase and selection of schools for this phase of implementation was driven by a need to link an early years intervention, Flying Start, to the Foundation Phase. It was felt that children who had been involved in Flying Start, a programme of support for families of children aged 0-3 in disadvantaged communities in Wales, would benefit from continuing in to the Foundation Phase. Following a delay to the final roll-out of the Foundation Phase to all schools, it was decided that an additional 22 schools and 22 funded non-maintained settings should be introduced to the Foundation Phase ahead of the final roll-out to ensure continuity for children from Flying Start.
- 5.22 Following a delay, the final roll-out of Foundation Phase to all remaining schools and funded non-maintained settings began in 2008/09 for children in nursery classes (i.e. children aged 3-4). By the school year 2011/12 all children aged 3 to 7-years-old were undertaking the Foundation Phase.
- 5.23 In 2010, the Welsh Government commissioned a study to explore the experience of the transition from the Foundation Phase to Key Stage 2 amongst the pilot and early start schools (Morris and McCrindle 2010).

6 The Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts of the Foundation Phase

- 6.1 The main *output* of the Foundation Phase was to roll-out a new curricula programme for early years education across Wales for 3 to 7-year-olds. As of 2011/12, all children aged 3 to 7-years-old receive the Foundation Phase. Children aged 3 to 4 attending maintained nursery settings/classrooms or funded non-maintained settings also follow the Foundation Phase, ensuring that there exists a 'national' curriculum framework that is directly linked to the National Curriculum in the school sector. It is possible, too, that children attending independent nursery settings also follow the Foundation Phase, although this information is not readily available.
- 6.2 During the course of the Pilot and Early Start phases a series of official documents were published that outline the design and content of the Foundation Phase (see Annex A). These *outputs* include a Framework for Children's Learning and a series of guidance documents for practitioners. However, there is little information available on their use and suitability, which will be a focus in the evaluation.
- 6.3 As outlined in the previous Chapter, a key *input* of the Foundation Phase has been the introduction of higher adult-to-child ratios in Foundation Phase classrooms, and the subsequent recruitment of additional teaching staff in schools. Funding was available from the very first introduction of the Foundation Phase in pilot settings for these new higher adult-to-child ratios. However, funding for this is now largely based on formula funding mechanisms as part of the Foundation Phase Grant to local authorities. The grant ensures that the funding is given to the schools to support them in meeting the higher ratios. All local authorities are required to submit to the Welsh Government an expenditure and delivery plan that is monitored on a quarterly basis. There is no statutory duty to meet these higher adult-to-child ratios in

classrooms, so it is largely up to schools (and local authorities) how this resource is used and what level of adult-to-child ratios are achieved in each classroom. Although some data is available on classroom sizes, adult-to-child ratios, and practitioner experience and qualifications, further detailed information will be collected throughout the evaluation to see what variation exists across schools and settings.

- 6.4 A key component of preparing practitioners to implement and deliver the Foundation Phase comes from Local Authority provided training activities. There are neither reported targets for training provision nor any readily available information on the *outputs* (e.g. take-up) of this provision by the Welsh Government. Similarly there is no reported information relating to the use or suitability of the Welsh Government annual conferences on the Foundation Phase. This will be a focus of the ongoing evaluation.
- 6.5 End of Phase Assessments have now been completed by several cohorts of children in Pilot and Early Start school settings. All Year 2 children will be completing the Foundation Phase End of Phase Assessments during 2011/12. The results of these *outputs* will be analysed in detail during the evaluation.
- 6.6 School environments (particularly outdoors) will have been modified and adapted to facilitate the principles and practices of the Foundation Phase. Again, there is no national reporting on the availability and/or use of resources for adapting the school environment for the Foundation Phase. Further details of this *output* will be collected during the evaluation.
- 6.7 In the original aims or proposals for the Foundation Phase there are few explicit *outcomes* stated. Indeed, in *The Learning Country* (NAfW 2001a) there were no targets given for pre-Key Stage 2. However, it is possible to begin to identify a range of outcomes that may be expected

from the Foundation Phase, most of which will take several years before the Foundation Phase will have an impact. These would include:

- greater motivation and enhanced positive learning dispositions by age 7
- some improvement in educational average achievement by age 11+ (e.g. literacy, numeracy, Welsh language)
- reduced differential attainment between particular groups of children by age 11+ (e.g. by socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity)
- improved average educational achievement by age 15 and fewer school leavers with no qualifications
- higher rates of participation in post-compulsory education (FE and HE)
- improved wellbeing and strengthened dispositions to learning for all learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- lower rates of average non-attendance for all learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- improved social and emotional development amongst children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- greater involvement of parents/carers in the education experience of children.

6.8 The stated aims of the Foundation Phase are more aligned to the broader *impacts* that it is expected to have. These include:

- improved preparation for learning for KS2 onwards
- raised educational achievement of children at age 15 (KS4)
- increased participation in post-compulsory education (e.g. FE and HE) or other vocational training
- alleviating some of the impact of socio-economic disadvantage for learners
- increased social and emotional wellbeing for children and young people

- improved inter-generational transmission of positive attitudes and influence on education and learning
- reduced socio-economic disparities within Wales.

6.9 The Foundation Phase may also lead to broader improvements in the professional experience of teachers and practitioners, which may in turn help to attract high quality teachers in the future and encourage greater continuous professional development.

7 Policy Logic Model: Discussion and Conclusions

Key issues and questions for the evaluation

- 7.1 The Policy Logic Model for the Foundation Phase is summarised in Figure 1. The development of this initial Logic Model will help guide the evaluation of the Foundation Phase. It is also expected that the Logic Model will continue to develop throughout the evaluation as further information and evidence is gathered. We would expect that a second version of the Logic Model may be published towards the end of the evaluation (during 2014) in order to aid the future and ongoing evaluation of the Foundation Phase.
- 7.2 However, in developing this Logic Model we have begun to identify a number of issues and questions that are important to consider in helping to inform the development of the evaluation.
- 7.3 The first issue is that within the published documentation, there is not always a clear chain of reasoning between the identification of problems and conditions that the Foundation Phase was originally intended to address (e.g. spending too much time at tables; the ability and quality of teachers), and the stated aims of the Foundation Phase (e.g. to raise children's standards of achievement; enhance their positive attitudes to learning; address their developing needs; enable them to benefit from educational opportunities later in their lives; and help them become active citizens within their communities). This is particularly important since it is fairly evident that the design and orientation of the Foundation Phase has developed in response to the kind of micro-level challenges or 'shortcomings' identified for early years education in Wales. But on the other hand, these kinds of contextual issues have not been translated into an equivalent set of aims for the Foundation Phase. There is, then, a danger in relying on an evaluation of the stated aims without regard for the underlying

challenges that the Foundation Phase was designed to address. Similarly, the stated aims may reflect some wider, more structural issues, that it was hoped the Foundation Phase would also address. Two key questions arise from this. The first is **was there ample consideration of the broader structural challenges and conditions of early years education in the development of the Foundation Phase?** By ignoring such structural issues facing young children and early years education, it is possible that the Foundation Phase as currently constituted, may have little impact on such challenges. Indeed, it might even be the case that it has not been targeted at the underlying causes of the more micro-level shortcomings it was specifically designed to address. A second, and related, question this raises for the evaluation is, **to what extent will it be possible to demonstrate a causal relationship between the kind of intended outcomes and impacts and the particular policy and practice levers (the *inputs*) that constitute the Foundation Phase?** For example, if achievement, or standards, were to raise in the coming years, will it be possible to demonstrate the relative 'effects' or cause of the different constituent parts of the Foundation Phase, such as the higher adult-to-child ratios, the additional funding for school environments, the training and support offered to practitioners, or the new approach to teaching and learning. This is a known challenge that faces most policy evaluations. However, it seems to be particularly exacerbated by this tension and the highly complex, theoretical rationale, which underpins the assumed connection between the micro-level 'actions' to macro-level 'impacts'.

- 7.4 The second issue to arise from this is the relative absence of any pre-determined indicators for measuring the impact (positive or negative) of the Foundation Phase. It is clearly the case that the underlying principle of the Foundation Phase does not support the use of targets. This 'philosophical position', within the Welsh Government, not to impose any kind of targets has tended to dominate education policy in all years since *The Learning Country* was published in 2001. This

particularly reflects the shift in approach and philosophy for education during the first few years of schooling. Instead, where there is explicit target-setting, the focus is on making improvements in the educational achievement after age 11. However, although there is little explicit reference made to this, it is implied that the Foundation Phase should provide a 'flying start' and 'solid foundation' for future educational success. A key question that then arises is, **how can the effectiveness of the Foundation Phase be monitored in order to ensure that progress in educational attainment after age 11 be assured?** Without regular monitoring of ability and development during a child's life course, it may not be possible to ensure that progress is being made until it is perhaps too late. In the current climate of 'raising standards' in Wales this may become increasingly addressed. But then this raises the question as to whether the principles of the Foundation Phase can be maintained if a focus on raising standards, and increased performance management of schools and local authorities (through, for example, primary school banding), begin to dominate practitioners' approaches to teaching and learning.

- 7.5 The third main issue is that many of the aims of the Foundation Phase can only be defined along "qualitative dimensions" (*The Learning Country* NafW 2001a:61). The problem here is that very few qualitative indicators were identified or utilised in the establishment of the Foundation Phase. Such qualitative indicators can be developed and, therefore, necessitates a detailed, qualitative, examination of the Foundation Phase and its impacts. However, two questions arise from this. The first is, **what qualitative indicators should the evaluation develop and use, that ensure the original aims of the Foundation Phase are examined?** The second question is, in the absence of any prior qualitative indicators and measures, **to what extent can the evaluation demonstrate changes in the more qualitative impacts of the Foundation Phase?**

7.6 A fourth key issue to arise from preparing the Logic Model, is that the origins and rationale for a number of key components within the design and content of the Foundation Phase (particularly the inputs) have not necessarily been made explicit in any of the published documents. For example, decisions about the level of adult-to-child ratios in the Foundation Phase, the nature of the training and support required in implementing the Foundation Phase, and the level of resourcing and investment required to improve outdoor school environments, are not fully known. In particular, it is not always clear how these inputs relate to the underlying rationale for the Foundation Phase, and how they are specifically meant to address the aims and deliver the outcomes of the Foundation Phase. Although this can often be implied there is a danger that this becomes a post-hoc justification for their selection and design rather than a reflection of the evidence utilised in the original decision-making. To some extent, this could be addressed by understanding more about the decision-making and design processes of the Foundation Phase during its inception. So, the question that perhaps needs considering is, **would it be helpful to the evaluation to collect further evidence on the early decisions, design and implementation of the Foundation Phase?** The problem here is that many key individuals involved in the early decision-making processes are no longer involved in the Foundation Phase or the Welsh Government.

7.7 A related fifth issue to this, is whether there were any specific targets or intentions for some of the inputs, particularly in terms of the implementation and roll-out of the Foundation Phase. In particular, this raises further questions about the role and nature of the training and support deemed necessary in moving to a new approach to teaching and learning in the early years, and what consequences this might have had beyond schools and local authorities, such as in teacher education. **A specific question for the evaluation is, then, what training and support has been offered and taken up, how has this**

been developed, and what were the original intentions for training and support?

7.8 The sixth issue that needs further consideration arises from our detailed analysis of the underlying rationale for the Foundation Phase (particularly in terms of its approach to teaching and learning). It is fairly clear that there are a number of tensions within that might make the interpretation and subsequent implementation of the Foundation Phase difficult for practitioners. This has already been highlighted by the two previous Welsh Government funded studies in to the Foundation Phase. It is therefore quite central to this evaluation to ask, **how is the Foundation Phase understood and being interpreted in local authorities, schools, classrooms and funded non-maintained settings?**

7.9 The final issue that this report highlights is that in the absence of any explicit targets or previous measurement of factors that were designed to change, the evaluation will have to carefully justify and develop its own tools for identifying and measuring the impact of the Foundation Phase. However, the evaluation must be sensitive to the underlying principles of the Foundation Phase to limit the importance and impact of measurable outcomes at the end of the Phase and not to be seen as explicitly providing readiness for Key Stage 2. In particular, further consideration perhaps ought to be given as to **how should the evaluation report the impacts and outcomes of the Foundation Phase?**

7.10 It should be recognised that many of these issues have a bearing on the evaluation, as it is not always possible to assess the extent to which the Foundation Phase as it was originally designed and intended, has been fully realised. Nevertheless, the issues and questions highlighted above do help direct the focus of the evaluation, and it is the intention of the evaluation to attempt to address or

reconcile many of these issues, and shape the future monitoring and ongoing evaluation of the programme.

Discussion

7.11 The Foundation Phase is a radical and eclectic early years framework drawing on best practice from Wales, Europe and beyond. Phillips and Ochs (2004) note that the idea of ‘policy borrowing’ has a long history – the motivation being to gain “useful lessons from abroad” (Noah and Eckstein 1969, cited in Phillips and Ochs 2004:774). They cite, as a recent example, the current interest in Finland as a result of its high ranking in the recent PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) survey. Phillips and Ochs also identify three phases of ‘policy borrowing’: cross-national attraction – which, as in Wales, may include internal dissatisfaction or political change; decision-making; and finally, internalisation or domestication of policy (integration), where it becomes part of the system of the borrower country. It is at this stage that the possibility of assessing the effects on the pre-existing policy becomes possible.

7.12 Arguably, this interest has been both intensified and made more accessible as the result of globalisation which has opened up to nations the world of early childhood programmes, and the apparent long-term effects of these, alongside the need for a well-educated workforce in order to develop or maintain ‘high-value, high-skill economies’ (Diamond 2008 TLRP). In the Introduction, we noted that addressing the challenges of the global marketplace appeared to be one of the key drivers for the establishment of the Foundation Phase.

Social Pedagogy and School Readiness

7.13 The idea that it is possible to draw on programmes that have differing culturally embedded philosophical and political roots and values has been questioned (see, for example, Goouch and Bryan 2006). In relation to the effects of globalisation, one of the major tensions that

has been considered, is between programmes that fit within a 'social pedagogy' model and those that resonate with a 'school readiness' or 'pre-primary' model.

- 7.14 Bennett (2006) points to a difference between the kindergarten (social pedagogy) tradition of the Nordic and central European countries and the pre-primary approach found in Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, the UK and the USA. Bennett (2006) maintains that the social pedagogy approach recognises the rights and significance of children, families and communities with a strong emphasis on "learning to live together and on supporting children in their current developmental tasks and interests" (2006:60) as a "broad preparation for life" (2006:60).
- 7.15 Curricula tend to be in the form of broad frameworks that are locally interpreted although settings must respect the "natural learning strategies of young children... learning through play, interaction, activity and personal investigation" (p.60) with co-operative project work while "encouragement of children's initiatives and meaning-making" are seen strongly to support children's cognitive development. Citing Martin-Kopi (2005), Bennett (2006) notes that the main objective is for children to develop positive dispositions towards learning rather than meeting pre-determined learning objectives related to levels of knowledge and skill.
- 7.16 In contrast, Bennett (2006) maintains that in the 'pre-primary approach' or 'readiness for school' model, the contents and methods of the primary school are introduced in the early years. There is a focus on 'standards and outcomes' which detail what children should know and be able to do at the end of the programme. These relate to knowledge, skills and dispositions deemed useful in formal schooling – that demonstrate children have been 'made ready' to read and write and 'conform' to classroom procedures (Bennett, 2006).

7.17 Bennett (2006) helpfully polarises these models in order to make visible their differences but, as he recognises, in reality, they may represent different ends of the same continuum. An example of a framework that broadly embraces the idea of ‘school readiness’ - that is rooted in constructivist ideas but also draws on sociocultural perspectives – is ‘Developmentally Appropriate Practice’ (DAP). It has been suggested that this approach represents the agreed position in the USA and appears to be influential in the UK (see Siraj-Blatchford 1999). Given the many resonances with the Foundation Phase – in relation to the documentation at least – we now attempt to describe DAP in some detail, drawing on NAEYC’s (2009) ‘Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice’.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

7.18 Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is a framework of principles and guidelines for best practice in early childhood education and care for children from birth to age eight; it is not an educational model although it is adopted in, for example, the US High/Scope programme.

7.19 Teacher intentionality and knowledge of child development appear to be at the core of DAP. Thus, in their work with children, early childhood practitioners consider what is known about child development – what children of a particular age are typically like so that they can make decisions about possible activities and resources, and in order to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, what is known about each child within the context of that child’s past experiences, family, culture, linguistic norms and so on.

7.20 The key principles of child development that inform practice, include a recognition that all domains of development and learning are important and inter-related: that development results from the interaction between the biological and the social; and that while many aspects of development and learning follow known sequences, progress through

these sequences varies from child to child and at uneven rates across different areas of a child's profile. It is also noted, for example: that development proceeds from the concrete towards the abstract and towards greater self-regulation; children's early experiences have a profound effect on a child's development and learning – including the development of positive learning dispositions; and that there are optimal periods for certain types of development and learning to occur.

- 7.21 The value of play is emphasised – particularly for its role in supporting self-regulation – and children are constructed as active meaning makers who learn in a variety of ways and therefore need to be supported by the utilisation of a range of teaching strategies. Warm, responsive relationships with adults are established and positive relationships with peers are encouraged. For example, teachers help children to talk through any conflicts with their peers. Teachers may participate in children's play, they may demonstrate, model and create challenges. Scaffolding is seen as a key feature of the adult's role.
- 7.22 It is maintained that there should be a balance of adult-guided and child-guided experiences. Citing Epstein (2007), it is noted that: "Adult-guided experience proceeds primarily along the lines of the teacher's goals, but is also shaped by the children's active engagement; child-guided experience proceeds primarily along the lines of children's interests and actions, with strategic teacher support" (NAEYC 2009:17).
- 7.23 Teachers plan holistically integrating children's learning within and across all areas of children's development and learning (including literacy and mathematics), taking into account children's interests and needs. Curricula goals may be 'academic' (e.g. relating to literacy and numeracy) but also include the development of social and emotional competence. Assessment focuses on children's progress towards the identified desired goals and involves input from families and from children.

- 7.24 As indicated above, there is a recognition that development and learning occur in, and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts, and that teachers need to view each child within the sociocultural context of that child's family and community. Respectful, reciprocal relationships are established with families, and teachers should recognise children's need, in the increasingly global economy, to be able to function well within a cultural diverse society.
- 7.25 Mapping out some of the key elements of DAP it is possible to identify many resonances with the Foundation Phase (see Table 3). For example, both adopt a developmental approach and focus on the individual child; both draw on constructivist/sociocultural perspectives (amongst others) so promoting play and active, experiential learning; and both suggest practitioners adopt a range of teaching approaches dependent on the nature and aim of particular activities.
- 7.26 It is noted, however, that DAP refers to a balance between 'adult-guided' and 'child-guided' activities rather than between 'practitioner-directed' and 'child-initiated'. Significantly, while NAEYC (2009) maintains curricular goals may be academic or social/emotional, it indicates that the curriculum is likely to be light touch and regionally or locally agreed rather than extensive and statutory as in the Foundation Phase.

The Move Towards 'School Readiness'

- 7.27 In recent years, as a result of the pressures of the globalised marketplace, there has been a discernible shift in the early childhood education and care policies of some countries from social pedagogy towards a model that incorporates aspects of school readiness.

Table 3: A Comparison between the FP and DAP (Information on DAP taken from NAEYC (2009))

	Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)	Foundation Phase
Status:	Non-statutory framework of principles and guidelines for best practice (birth-8 years)	National, statutory framework for children’s learning (3-7 years)
Underpinning approach:	Developmental – but recognition of child’s individual rate of progress; All domains of development and learning are inter-related	Developmental – but recognition of child’s individual rate of progress; All domains of development and learning are inter-related
Associated theories of learning:	Constructivist; Sociocultural	Constructivist; Sociocultural
Key ideas:	Learning through play; Self-regulation; Positive learning dispositions; Motivation; Self-confidence; Self-esteem; Self-efficacy	Learning through play; Empowerment; Positive learning dispositions; Motivation; Self-confidence; Self-esteem; Competence
Children constructed as:	Active meaning makers; Unique individuals (focus on the individual child)	Active meaning makers; Unique individuals (focus on the individual child)
Curricula goals:	May be academic and social/emotional but regionally/locally agreed	Academic and social/emotional; Statutory
Classification and framing (see footnote 18)	Weak classification; Weak/moderate framing	Weak/moderate classification; Mixed framing
Activities/experiences:	Balance of adult-guided and child-guided	Balance of practitioner-directed and child-initiated
Role of practitioner:	To scaffold, model, demonstrate, challenge	To facilitate, co-construct, scaffold, model, demonstrate and direct
Adult/child relationships:	Warm, responsive relationships	Positive relationships mentioned but not emphasised
Home/community/culture:	Significance of authentic ‘partnership’ with parents and taking into account children’s social and cultural contexts emphasised	Significance of partnership with parents and children’s social and cultural contexts noted
Cultural identity/diversity:	Emphasis on supporting children’s developing awareness of their own and different cultures	Emphasis on supporting children’s developing awareness of their own and different cultures

7.28 In Scandinavia, while there has been no reform of Finnish education policy, Norway has introduced ‘knowledge promotion’ which aims to help all children “develop fundamental skills to enable them to participate actively in our society of knowledge”. This includes a strengthening of basic skills with reading and writing emphasised from the first grade (age 6)¹⁶. Sweden has clarified and extended goals for children’s development in terms of language, mathematics, natural sciences and technology and clarified the “pedagogical responsibilities of preschool teachers”¹⁷. Einarsdottir (2006) comments that in Nordic countries, ‘teaching’ has now entered the early childhood education and care discourse even if this is being interpreted (re-interpreted) by practitioners as helping children to learn ‘academics’ informally.

The Challenge for Policy-Makers in Wales

7.29 A key challenge faced by the Welsh Government in developing the Foundation Phase, then, is not unique. It is maintained (OECD, no date) that (sociocultural) programmes which, for example, recognise children’s agency, emphasise choice and autonomy, involve spontaneous and emergent learning, promote participation in decision-making and emphasise child-initiated activities, may result in long-term benefits in relation to social development and motivation to pursue higher education, so addressing any concerns with pupil disaffection (OECD *no date*).

7.30 On the other hand, teacher-initiated approaches involving ‘explicit teaching’ can reduce knowledge gaps in literacy, language and numeracy in the short-term; OECD (no date) notes that such skills are also strong predictors of children’s later achievements in these areas (see, for example, Schweinhart and Weikhart 1997; Duncan et al. 2007). The inclusion of teacher-initiated (practitioner-directed) activities

¹⁶ Norway Ministry of Education and Research, <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kd.html?id=586>

¹⁷ Status and Pedagogical task of preschool to be strengthened: Fact Sheet U11.009, Ministry of Education and Research, Sweden, <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/14051/a/172124>

may thus be particularly important as an intervention for children living in difficult home circumstances.

7.31 As the OECD report (*ibid*) indicates, (citing Sheridan 2011, Sheridan et al. 2009), it may thus be prudent for early childhood programmes to incorporate some teacher-initiated activities alongside child-initiated activities.

Conclusion

7.32 The approach, pedagogy and curriculum promoted in the Foundation Phase appear to address the identified concerns and aims as set out in the Learning Country (NAfW 2001a) and the Foundation Phase proposals (NAfW 2003a). That is, adopting a developmental approach and promoting pedagogy that incorporates constructivist but emphasises sociocultural perspectives, and placing children's Personal and Social Development, Wellbeing and Cultural Diversity at the core of the Foundation Phase, may ensure that children's learning and development – including their wellbeing, positive learning dispositions and positive attitudes to cultural diversity – are supported through appropriate, interesting and meaningful activities and experiences. This may guard against pupil disaffection and lead to greater social competence and higher achievement in the longer term. It may also support children's motivation to become lifelong learners.

7.33 Identifying Welsh Language Development as a discrete Area of Learning within English-medium schools and settings with expectations that broadly match those of the Language, Literacy and Communication Skills AoL, may support the development of Wales as a bilingual nation.

7.34 In addition, retaining a statutory, skills-focused curriculum and an expectation that practitioners will undertake some direct teaching alongside child-initiated activities, may ensure that young children,

particularly those from disadvantaged homes, are supported in the early development of literacy and numeracy, crucial for their later achievement.

7.35 We suggest that two key challenges may face Foundation Phase practitioners. The first is to make sense of some of the terminology used in and across the Foundation Phase documentation: particularly in relation to pedagogy. A second is to ascertain how this relatively new pedagogy that incorporates constructivist theory and emphasises sociocultural ideas, and which is underpinned by a strongly developmental approach, can best be integrated or intertwined with a detailed statutory curriculum – and a statutory LNF. While practitioners are, for example, asked to plan for the development and wellbeing of the individual child and to adopt a play-based experiential approach to learning, expectations in terms of children’s outcomes in relation to a substantial number of specified skills, knowledge and concepts remain essentially unchanged. This possible relationship will be explored further in the next stages of the evaluation.

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Appendix A. Framework for Analysis of Foundation Phase Documentation

	The Developing Child	The Social Child (in a cultural context)
Underpinning concern:	Children's development	Children's lived experiences as part of family, community and culture; self-concept, self-esteem
Associated theories of learning:	Constructivist/developmental psychology	Sociocultural
Key ideas:	Learning is dependent on the natural process of development and maturation; builds on current understandings; development as linear and measurable	Learning transforms development; learning and development are embedded within and dependent on culture and context; there is a focus on participation, rights, empowerment, positive learning dispositions; language and communication
Children constructed as:	Active meaning makers Unique individuals Lone scientist acting on the world	Active meaning makers, social agents, citizens
Curriculum and pedagogy:	Child at the heart of learning (child-centred); holistic; play; active experiential learning; discovery	Learning is dependent on relationships; emergent curriculum; play, social interaction; exploration; creativity; empowerment
Activities/experiences:	Adult structured/child-initiated	Child-initiated, adult supported/extended; focus on talk and meaning-making
Classification and framing¹⁸:	Weak classification and weak framing	Very weak/weak classification and moderate framing

¹⁸ See Bernstein 1981, 2000. 'Classification' is taken to refer to the extent to which subject boundaries are maintained within the curriculum – a strong classification would be one separated into individual subjects; a weak classification would be one where subjects are integrated. 'Framing' refers to the location of control in relation to pedagogy: a strong framing would be pedagogy that is tightly teacher-controlled whereas weak framing would be one where children have more freedom.

Role of practitioner:	To prepare an appropriate environment to facilitate and support learning; to observe; to evaluate progress against milestones or stages; to support differentiated learning	To 'listen'; scaffold; guide; model; extend; to engage in children's play and learning; to document and explore children's theories, experiences, actions and interactions
Adult/child relationships:	Not emphasised	Warm, responsive and authentic relationships
Parents/carers:		Close relationships, partnership
Evidenced in:	Progressive, child-centred practice/traditional nursery	Preschools of Reggio Emilia; Te Whāriki.
Key terminology includes:	Growth, freedom, nurture, schema, natural; milestones, stages, concrete to abstract; average, normal; readiness; holistic; 'appropriateness' to stage of development	Relationships, participation, voice, wellbeing/self-esteem; parents, families and communities, culture, inclusion, play, authentic activities, meaning, story, shared learning journey

Appendix B. Detailed Analysis of Foundation Phase Areas of Learning

1 Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity

Focus statement: The introductory focus statement emphasises the centrality of this AoL and that it should be developed through ‘participation in experiential learning activities across the curriculum’. This AoL includes children learning about themselves and their relationships with others; being encouraged in the development of self-esteem, personal beliefs and moral values; and an awareness of and tolerance towards different cultures as well as their own cultural and Welsh identity and traditions. Children’s motivation and commitment to learning - their positive learning dispositions - are encouraged and children are supported in becoming ‘confident, competent thinkers and learners’ (p.15).

Skills and range: The focus statement broadly resonates with the ‘skills and range’ items with the addition of children’s independence in personal hygiene (as in the DO).

Approach: The guidance broadly reflects the Framework skills, and maps children’s development and appropriate experiences within the areas of personal development, social development, moral and spiritual development, and wellbeing (self-identity, self-esteem and physical wellbeing). It includes specific guidance on learning to learn/dispositions to learning, which incorporates independence. This section refers to the work of Ferre Laevers in relation to children’s ‘involvement’ (p.20). Encouraging children to be active partners in the learning process may indicate respect for children’s rights (p.24). **Progress in learning:** This sets out the opportunities children should be given ‘when they are developmentally ready’ (pp.28-31). Learning to learn/dispositions to learning, and independence, are incorporated within personal development. These map closely on to the Framework skills for this AoL with a small number of statements expanded at the higher levels of the learning continuum (pp.28-31).

Outcomes: Levels 1-3 broadly map on to DO. Levels 4-6 incorporate some aspects of the Personal and Social Education Framework: Key stages 1-4 in Wales, ACCAC, 2000 but these are considerably expanded.

Overall, this AoL adopts a slightly less developmental approach than most other AoLs.

2 Language, Literacy and Communication Skills

Focus statement: This notes that children develop their language skills through talking, signing/communicating and listening. Children should be encouraged to communicate their needs, feelings and thoughts, to listen to and respond to others. They should have opportunities to choose and use reading materials, to understand the conventions of print and books and be given a wide range of opportunities to enjoy mark-making and writing experiences as well as develop an awareness of, and positive attitudes towards, Wales as a bilingual nation.

Skills and range: The AoL incorporates statements from DO, KS1 programme of study for English and KS1 Programme of study for Welsh (2nd language). The skills expand on expectations, particularly in relation to writing.

The approach: The LLC guidance is explicitly developmental in approach. Some of the activities that could support children's development and the range of experiences children should have within each area are outlined. Broadly based progression in reading and stages of writing development are noted as are activities that support children's hand-eye coordination, gross motor and fine manipulative skill. It is anticipated that children will be taught phonics 'in a structured and imaginative way to ensure the progressive continuum of phonic development' (p.14), that the early stages of reading will progress 'within a comprehensive reading program' (p.15), and that children will not just be made to read through a commercial scheme (p.16).

Progress in learning: This identifies the knowledge, skills and understandings in which children should make progress (pp.32-37). The oracy progress statements map on to the Framework 'skills and range' statements. In reading, the progress statements also map on to the related 'skills and range' statements but some (e.g. phonics) are expanded in detail and scope. It is noted that not one approach to reading is promoted as children should also be supported in reading for meaning and developing a sight vocabulary. Similar extensions are noted within writing that relate to content (and

developmental stages) in, for example, spelling and handwriting.

Outcomes: The DO broadly map on to FP outcomes 1 to 3 although the DO refers to using mark-marking implements for a range of purposes: painting, drawing, writing, scribbling (DO, p.5), while FP outcome 3 maintains children 'hold writing instruments appropriately, discriminate between letters and begin to write in a conventional way (p.46). FP levels 4-6 map onto KS1 levels 1-3. *This AoL is explicitly developmental in approach and is detailed in relation to content.*

3 Mathematical Development

The focus statement: This notes that in the FP, children develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of mathematics through oral, practical and play activities, using and applying mathematics in, for example, practical tasks and real-life problems in both indoor and outdoor environments. Mirroring the early emphasis on talking, communicating and listening in LLC, it is noted that in the FP 'much of children's work will be oral' (p.23) and that children should develop a range of flexible methods for working mentally with number before moving on to using more formal methods of working and recording 'when they are developmentally ready' (p.23).

Skills and Range: While the 'skills' described are relatively broad and brief, the 'range' outlines the opportunities children should be given within number; measures and money; shape, position and movement; and handling data. The 'range' statements are fairly detailed in terms of content. Compared with some other range statements, mathematical development places less emphasis on play (other than play with shapes) but does include investigation and experimentation.

The approach: The guidance document emphasises the significance of learning mathematical concepts through play, talk, investigating, taking part in relevant, hands-on experiences. A developmental approach is emphasised. Content and examples of activities relating to children's progress along the learning continuum are given in each of the main areas of mathematics. Number is described as 'One of the most important mathematical concepts for children to acquire' (p.10).

Progress in Learning This sets out the knowledge, understandings and skills

in which children will make progress (pp.35-38). These statements include more detailed descriptions of content but broadly match the 'range' statements. Some are expanded and include greater detail at the higher levels of learning continuum.

Outcomes: DO statements link to FP level 2 and level 3 statements. FP level 3 statement focuses on and is more explicit in terms of number and calculations than on broader aspects of mathematical development/ mathematical concepts. The FP levels 4, 5 and 6 link across to NC levels 1, 2 and 3.

This AoL is developmental in approach and is detailed in terms of content.

4 Welsh Language Development (2nd language)

The focus statement: This notes that children should listen to Welsh being spoken, communicate their needs and respond in Welsh. Skills will be developed through communicating in a range of enjoyable, practical, planned activities, using a range of stimuli and building on children's previous experiences in safe and stimulating indoor and outdoor environments. Opportunities to develop their reading, mark-making and developing their writing skills in Welsh should also be supported.

Skills and range: This is a slightly modified version of the 'skills and range' statements for LLC.

Approach: The guidance document notes the commitment to establishing a truly bilingual Wales with all children feeling a sense of belonging to Wales and enjoying experiences in the Welsh language. Having a (Welsh) identity is seen as particularly important in the globalised world. The broad development of children's language learning experiences is mapped out. Learning activities are intended to complement those in the LLC guidance. Guidance on how to create a bilingual environment is given.

Progress in learning: This sets out the knowledge, understandings and skills in which children should make progress (pp.43-46). Progress in oracy, reading and writing broadly reflect a modified version of that included in the LLC document.

Outcomes: Although, for example, hearing stories and legends about Wales was encouraged, Welsh language development was not overtly supported in

the DO. FP levels 4-6 map directly on to KS1 statements for Welsh (2nd language) levels 1-3 with the word 'pupil' being replaced by 'children'.

This AoL is developmental in approach and detailed in relation to content.

5 Knowledge and Understanding of the World

Focus statement: Children's curiosity about the world around them should be supported through participation in experiential learning activities, enquiry and investigation in the indoor and outdoor environments. Using their senses, they should be encouraged to enjoy learning through exploration, enquiry, experimentation, etc, to demonstrate care, responsibility, concern and respect for all living things and the environment; and to develop and communicate their own ideas, opinions and feelings with imagination, creativity and sensitivity.

Skills and range: The 'skills and range' statements generally resonate with the introductory focus statement. These broadly link to DO and aspects of KS1 programmes levels 4-6 for Geography, History, Science and to a lesser extent Design & Technology.

Approach: The guidance material matches the focus statement and the framework skills, emphasising an exploratory investigative approach.

Progress in learning: This sets out the knowledge, skills and processes which will encourage children to be curious and to 'find out' and the opportunities they should be given within each aspect of learning (pp.26-28). Statements for each area replicate those included in the FP 'range' statements for this AoL.

Outcomes: Levels 1-3 broadly resonate with DO but are more focused on skills and processes. Outcomes 4-6 linked to KS1, again with a particular focus on skills and concepts.

The AoL reflects a less developmental approach than most.

6 Physical Development

Focus statement: Children should be encouraged to enjoy physical activity and this, and their physical development, should be promoted across all AoLs, indoors and outdoors. The statement refers to children's sense of identity and

its relationship with self-image, self-esteem and confidence and to children's personal development and the importance of diet, rest, sleep and exercise.

Skills and range: The focus statement resonates with the 'skills and range' statements. There is an emphasis on exploring, investigating and play – including child-initiated play.

Approach: The guidance document notes the focus on increasing the skills and performance of the body. The close link is noted between physical and cognitive development and between children's physical skills, body and spatial awareness and their personal and social development, confidence and self-esteem. The broad sequence of physical development is given. The development of physical play and physical skills, and opportunities that should be provided to children in order to support these, are outlined.

'Physical play' is referred to as 'adventurous and physical play' in the Framework. In relation to supporting the development of gross motor skills the progression moves from indoor and outdoor play to opportunities to participate in gymnastics and dances activities (pp.13-14). The Framework's 'health, fitness and safety' statements are expanded to include healthy eating and wellbeing (fitness is not included in the title) (p.19).

Progress in learning: This concisely sets out the knowledge, understandings and skills in which children will make progress (pp.23-24). These statements broadly match, but expand on, the FP 'skills and range' statements.

Outcomes: DO maps on to 1-3 but the FP outcomes are more specific and include references to assessments of children's physical development – developmental milestones. For example, outcome 2 - 'can stand on one foot for a moment' 'can build a tower of nine or ten bricks' (p.54) 'can cut paper into two pieces using scissors', 'grasp a pencil/crayon maturely and have good control' (p.54). Levels 4-6 generally reflect the FP emphasis on children's development rather than physical education – e.g. level 4 stand and run on tiptoes, jump backwards and run forwards on one foot.

This AoL is explicitly developmental in approach.

7 Creative Development

Focus statement: Children should be continually developing their imagination and creativity across the curriculum with their 'natural curiosity

and disposition to learn' stimulated by sensory experiences in the indoors and outdoor environments. Children should engage in creative, imaginative and expressive activities, explore a wide range of stimuli and develop their ability to communicate and express their creative ideas and to reflect on their work.

Skills and range: These statements emphasise the exploration of the key elements, processes and techniques (under skills) within art, craft and design and music. Reference is made to performing movements and patterns from traditional Welsh dances and other cultures.

Approach: It is noted that in the early stages of development the creative process is more important than any outcome as it allows children to develop the process of thinking and communicating ideas in a symbolic way (p.5). The role of the practitioner is to facilitate challenge, observe, interact and intervene/support, monitor and evaluate (p.10). The experiences and broad progression detailed within each area resonates with and expand those included in the Framework 'skills and range' statements but includes the use of ICT.

Progress in Learning: This concisely sets out the knowledge, understandings and skills in which children will make progress (pp.26-27). These replicate the range statements in the Framework document.

Outcomes: DO focused on, for example, responding to and enjoying rhythm in music and music making, enjoying role play, responding to suggestions for dance and imitate movement, using a range of materials to create representational images, differentiating sounds (such as animals, voices) without visual clues. The FP outcomes reflect these but are more detailed and specific at levels 1-3, referring to for example, musical elements. Levels 4-6 broadly map on to KS1 levels 1-3.

This AoL is less developmental in approach than most others.