Planning and Assessment
At the Early Level

April 2012
Foreword

Planning and assessment is a process which is essential in supporting the child’s learning and development. It is a daily ongoing process which involves all staff working with the learners.

This paper is a guidance document based on good practice and should be seen as a useful tool for self evaluation and developing professional dialogue.

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**Introduction**

In this paper we aim to explore and identify the key features of Planning and Assessment at the Early Level. It is important that we recognise that Planning and Assessment is a **process** not an end result, that it is neither limited nor driven by paperwork, but is part of an ethos of ensuring quality experiences for children in order that they develop into happy, healthy thinkers.

*“Education is in the hearts and minds of people...not in the papers and documents of bureaucracy”*

**Bart McGettrick, Dean of Education, Liverpool Hope University**

Planning and Assessment should be underpinned by informed knowledge of the child as a whole, including his or her place within the family and community, and should link closely to our aspirations for children. As such we are aiming to develop children as successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. Cognisance should then be taken of the model “Getting it Right for Every Child”

The GIRFEC model provides the underpinning values for the education and well being of the whole child, of which Planning and Assessment should form its roots and foundations in.
It is also important that we promote the UN conventions of the child to play and be consulted:

“The child has the right to express his or her views in all matters affecting the child and the child’s views given their due weight”

*Article 12*

“Every child has the right to rest, *play* and leisure”

*Article 31*

Argyll and Bute’s position is also clearly stated in the paper, “Building the Curriculum-Aspirations and Expectations”:

“At all stages the curriculum should develop learners’ knowledge, understanding and skills. It is important that pupils become aware of the connections amongst curricular areas and the way in which knowledge and skills can be used in a wide range of contexts.”
Key Features of Planning and Assessment

When exploring the key features of what we recognise to be quality planning and assessment, it is important to set “criteria for success”:

When planning for children we need to take account of the Principles of Curriculum Design as promoted within “A Curriculum for Excellence”, these being:

- Challenge and enjoyment
- Breadth
- Progression
- Depth
- Personalisation and choice
- Coherence
- Relevance

The principles must be taken into account when evaluating the experiences and activities we plan for children. It may be that the principles will have a different emphasis as a child learns and develops.

**Challenge and enjoyment**
Children should find their learning challenging, engaging and motivating. The curriculum should encourage high aspirations and ambitions for all. Challenge will enable each child to achieve his or her potential. There should also be opportunities for children to be engaged in “sustained shared thinking”.

**Breadth**
All children should have opportunities for a broad, suitably weighted range of experiences. The curriculum should be planned so that they will learn and develop through a variety of contexts within both the classroom/playroom and outdoors.

**Progression**
Children should experience continuous progression in their learning, taking account of prior learning and using this to build upon future learning. It should build upon earlier knowledge and achievements. Children should be able to progress at a rate which meets their needs and aptitudes, and keep options open so that routes are not closed off too early.

**Depth**
There should be opportunities for children to develop their full capacity for different types of thinking and learning. As they progress they should develop and apply increasing intellectual rigour, drawing different strands of learning together, and exploring and achieving more advanced levels of understanding. We have to consider what opportunities are provided for children to revisit their learning, and build upon it, in order that their learning can be applied to different contexts and is “secure”.

**Personalisation and choice**
The curriculum should respond to individual needs and support particular aptitudes and talents. It should give each young child increasing opportunities for exercising choice. There should be safeguards to ensure that choices are soundly based and lead to successful outcomes.
Coherence
Taken as a whole, young children’s learning activities should combine to form a coherent experience. There should be clear links between the different aspects of children’s learning, including opportunities for extended activities which draw different strands of learning together.

Relevance
In order for young children’s learning to be relevant, it has to link to concrete experiences, and stimulate interest and enthusiasm.

Linked to these principles, we also need to take account of and be informed by the following aspects when planning for young children:

Active Learning as the method of delivery. Active learning is described as:

“learning which engages and challenges children’s thinking using real life and imaginary situations. It takes full advantage of the opportunities presented by:

- spontaneous play
- planned, purposeful play
- investigating and exploring
- events and life experiences
- focused learning and teaching”

Building the Curriculum 2-Active Learning in the Early Years

The child’s learning style
Research shows that children have different learning styles as can be broadly summarised below:

- Visual learning style – The child receives information best through their eyes and what they see and read. Often these children teach themselves to read. They may find it difficult to concentrate on spoken instructions but respond well to visual aids such as pictures, diagrams and charts. They tend to visualise ideas and remember the visual details of places and objects they have seen.
- Auditory learning Style – This child learns best by hearing things – either on tape/cd or in a discussion. They are good at listening carefully and then repeating instructions either aloud or mentally in order to remember what they have learned. Children with this learning style tend to be the talkers as well as the listeners in group situations and benefit from being able to discuss ideas. Auditory learners can be easily distracted by noise and may concentrate better with background music to disguise potentially disruptive noises.
- Kinaesthetic learning style – This child reminds us of the term “energy in motion”. They need to make physical contact with things they are learning about. In fact, most young children instinctively prefer this method of learning – touching and experiencing helps them to make sense of new information.
- Social learning style – This child learns by interaction with other people. They thrive on one to one attention and again they learn well through direct experience.

It is important that we plan for the range of learning styles to accommodate the learning needs of our young children.
The child’s stage of development – the curriculum should be developmentally rather than age appropriate.

Observation - This is a key tool in informing planning and is often described as “listening with your eyes”. Observation both informs planning and acts as a means of assessment. All are linked closely:

- Planning
  - Deciding: what's next, experiences, opportunities,
  - The role of the adult

- Assessment
  - Analysing Observations,
  - Documenting what they tell us about children's interests and learning

- Observation
  - Look, listen, note, describe

Taking time to step back and observe children allows us as practitioners to reflect in what engages children, how they approach learning, (their learning style) what their strengths are and is an opportunity to identify next steps.

Takes account of children who have additional support needs – It may be that we have to adapt learning experiences, the environment or the participation methods to ensure that the opportunities we plan for children are tailored to meet their needs. This may also include providing challenge for more able children.

Children as contributors – Children have to be an integral part of the planning and assessment process – it is not something we “do” to children, rather it is something they are a part of and have ownership over. Children should contribute to the planning in a visual and practical way.

Takes account of skills and knowledge to be developed – This allows us to focus on the outcomes and experiences at the early level. More than this we need to “unpack” outcomes in order to identify key skills and knowledge.
Acknowledge the need to plan for the Environment – Time should be taken to consider the environment for learning, in order that we provide opportunities for breadth and balance, and that we meet individuals’ needs. We must consider the outdoor environment as part of our early years setting:

“Learning in the outdoors can make significant contributions to literacy, numeracy, health and well being. In literacy there are opportunities to use different texts: the spoken word, charts, maps, timetables and instructions. In numeracy there are opportunities to measure and calculate. In health and wellbeing there are opportunities to become physically active in alternative ways and to improve emotional wellbeing and mental health. Therefore outdoor learning offers many opportunities for learners to deepen and contextualise their understanding within curricular areas, and for linking learning across the curriculum in different contexts and at all levels. The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences.”

Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning

Consider the role of the practitioner – the practitioner has a key role to play in supporting and extending children’s learning, scaffolding where necessary. In our interactions with children we should demonstrate our responsiveness to their needs.

Be clear about the nature and purpose of assessment

- Assessment is an integral part of learning and teaching, and planning high quality learning activities for all children.
- Assessment provides an emerging picture of the child and their achievements, and can be a motivation for the child to do better and progress further in their learning.
- Assessment relates to the engagement of staff, children and parents, carers and the wider community in sharing and using a range of information to improve learning and development.
- Assessment can take different forms and as far as possible be “child friendly”

Assessment should as far as possible be formative:

“If we think of our children as plants...summative assessment of the plant is simply measuring them. The measurements might be interesting to compare and analyse, but in themselves, they do not affect the growth of the plants. Formative assessment on the other hand is the garden equivalent of feeding and watering the plants –directly affecting their growth”

Shirley Clarke
“Unlocking Formative Assessment”

For assessment to be meaningful, we have to use it as the building blocks for future learning.

In short – Assessment is for Learning!
Adults as co-learners - It is important that adults recognise themselves as learners who are learning alongside the children they work with. The role of the adult is to go on a journey of learning and discovery, scaffolding learning where necessary and helping children find solutions, while engaged in dialogue with the child. The role of the adult then has to be considered when involved in planning and assessment.

Positive links with the home and the wider community - Parents and carers should be given regular opportunities to contribute to the planning process and consideration given to their skills and experience. Assessments should be openly shared to allow for the parent/carer to contribute to the process with their views and insights.

Evaluation – The evaluation of planning and assessment should be an integral part of how we reflect on the learning process. It assists us in developing as reflective practitioners and will inform future planning and assessment. It allows children to influence future planning offering a different perspective to the adult.
Practical Considerations

Leadership

Those who take on the role of leadership should “lead the learning”, when it comes to planning and assessment. This may mean taking forward new initiatives in the curriculum, with staff, taking time to support them where necessary, particularly where there is a variance in experience. There is also the need for distributive leadership, where staff members take on according to their strengths and interests, areas of the curriculum to take forward, and are able to evaluate successes and difficulties within the wider team. Ongoing professional dialogue is within the team is an integral part of this process.

Sharing the Planning process

In order to share the planning process, children must have a direct role to play. This can be implemented through the use of:

- Mind Maps
- Big Book Planners - this approach has been promoted by Claire Wardens “Talking and Thinking Floor books” TM
- Plan-Do-Review approaches - children with adult help and support plan their activities and experiences, and this is reviewed with the child at the end of the session as a plenary.
- A Learning Wall - learning intentions are displayed visually, through photographs, children's comments and sometimes concrete items. The development of learning becomes apparent through the display.
- A thinking tree - children can record their interests and targets on leaf shapes attached to branches, and these are regularly referred to and modified as time goes on.
- Setting targets - “Next I'd like to ...”
- Digital Photographs coupled with children's dialogue

Look also for ways for parents and carers to contribute to the planning process. There may be opportunities for parents to contribute their ideas and skills. This applies also to grandparents and other community members.

Different ways of observing

It is likely that you will have a mixture of planned and spontaneous observations. Planned observations may link to the learning intentions you have identified for children and this can be a valid way of assessing children's learning.

It is useful to have a focus for the observation, which may be:

- how children access the planned learning experience/activity.
- what style of learning children employ when involved in an activity.
- if and how the child/children converses while involved in play.
- how engaged the child is and how s/he approaches tasks which provide challenge.
Opportunities for Assessment

Assessments are undertaken primarily to inform future planning. They can take place through the following ways:

- Observation while children are involved in active learning.
- A planned adult led activity
- Learning Stories
- Effective questioning - using open ended questions ("what if...?", "tell me how...", "why is it...?")

Children should also be given the opportunity to assess their own learning. This can be done through:

- Traffic lights/facial expressions
- Conversations
- Drawing

Developing Personal Profiles as a way of recording learning

For this to be meaningful to children, then they must have access to it. This will mean having it available to children at all times, to spend time sharing, looking at the profile with children. Some key components of a personal profile are suggested below:

- It is referred to often and in child friendly language - some settings refer to it as a “Smile file”, “My special book” or “My learning journey”.
- Samples of “work” that children are proud of or show significant learning.
- Photographs of children
- Learning Stories - there is no one set format, but rather key features which include a picture/piece of work or photograph evidence of significant learning coupled with children's narrative and an opportunity for the practitioner and parent to comment.
- Narrative - using the children's dialogue
- Comments from the Practitioner and Parent/carer
- Targets for learning - this may be very specific e.g. “I am going to try to make a castle from blocks” or “I am going to zip up my own coat”. It is important that we create an environment where there is no sense of failure on the part of the child when a target is not reached. We need to ensure that targets can be flexible, that children can change targets according to their needs and interests. It is the responsibility of the practitioner to ensure that this is managed carefully and sensitively.

Essentially, the profile is there to “tell the story” of the child in a holistic and meaningful way. As it is regularly shared with parents and carers, it is important that any written observations are recorded in a sensitive and professional manner.
Sharing successes and recognising wider achievement

Opportunities should exist to share successes in different ways:

- At the end of a session in conversation with parents/carers.
- Parents open days/meetings.
- Sharing of the learning profile and opportunities for the parent /carer/ child to record feedback either verbally or in writing.

Wider achievement out with the early years setting can also be recognised through photographs, wall displays and in quality conversation with children.

Time Management

Many practitioners comment on the time taken to “complete” plans and observations and assessments. Planning and assessment needs to be manageable. At times you will need to think creatively and in doing so you may wish to consider the following points:

- Planning and Assessment is not a tick box exercise, nor should it involve copious amounts of long narrative prose.
- Plan with children - let them “do the work”
- Record only what is significant-planning should have a clear purpose but have the flexibility to change direction according to changing needs and interests of the children. Observations that are written need only record what is really happening in terms of learning, and contain where appropriate, next steps.

Collecting evidence

Whilst there is a place for evidence of learning which may include, planning records, observations, assessments, personal learning profiles, always remember that the main body of evidence of good planning and assessment will be demonstrated through the children themselves – their levels of engagement, their ability to try out new challenges, their perseverance and their conversation.

Avoiding duplication

Consider carefully the recording of evidence - if you have a photograph and a sample of narrative from a child, and you are able to identify the significant learning going on, is it really necessary to record this again in written observation format? If you use a “big book planner” format are you also going to write up the children's ideas elsewhere?

Meeting every child’s needs

When planning a context for learning it is not possible to target every child’s specific interest all of the time. Perhaps there is a child who is very interested in castles for example, and this is the context for planning. It is however possible to incorporate other children’s interests and learning styles to fit this context, for example a child who is interested in art and craft can be involved in the learning opportunities involved in creating models and pictures of castles. The context may have been initially driven by a different child can still be adapted to meet the interests of all children. It is also possible to have more than one ongoing context at a time. Themes may run for only a short time according to interests and significant events. At other times a theme may run for longer than expected due to the level of engagement and depth of learning that is apparent.
Challenging environments

All early years settings are different and therefore can face different challenges. Even so, we should be encouraging ourselves to think creatively. Perhaps space is reduced or you have a limited outdoor area. In such situations, we should aspire to provide the best quality you can as a team, with the resources that are available to you. Keep in mind that your best resource is yourself!

Split placements

Within a pre five setting, there may be children who have a split placement between two different settings (or rarely across two different local authorities). In these situations there will be a need for shared information amongst professionals, in terms of observations and assessments in order that the settings can both tailor the child’s needs accordingly.

Planning Timescales

**Long term planning** may often be a brief overview of the year, which accounts for traditional events and festivals, and gives a broad outline of the breadth of learning opportunities. It should be fairly open ended and flexible. There are some settings who do not record long term plans as they are solely driven by the interests of the child. It is for managers to decide whether this is a requirement for their setting. An early level class for example may need to take account of a programme of early phonics or the introduction of an early years reading scheme.

**Medium term planning** may cover a month, six weeks or a fortnight – dependent on the nature of learning and the level of children's engagement. It will detail the context for learning, an overview of the experiences and activities to be offered and be closely linked to the C for E outcomes. It may detail opportunities for assessment where relevant. Children's ideas will be a significant feature.

**Short term planning** will detail the skills and knowledge, the “what” and “how” of learning opportunities, but again can be dynamic. Flexibility should exist to revisit and consolidate learning or need provide greater challenge.

It is for each setting to decide on the format of their planning and assessment. It must be acknowledged that no “one size fits all”, and where for example a big book planner approach may suit the children of one setting, a more traditional recording of plans may suit another. Included within the following appendices is guidance on what may be included in a long term plan, a medium term plan and a weekly plan. These are by no means intended to be prescriptive, and you may wish to adapt and amend as necessary. There may also be scope in collegiate working and sharing practice with other professionals from other settings.

A final quote for reflection:

“*We spend too much of our time worrying about the mosquitoes and not enough time concerning ourselves about the health of the pond*” (Anon)
Long Term Plan

May include:

- Dates
- Initial thinking of backdrops
- Curriculum focus – context for learning
- Opportunities for assessment
- Focus on literacy, numeracy and health and well-being.
Appendix 2

Medium Term Plan

May include:

- Context for Learning/A question to be posed
- Children's ideas
- Identified curricular areas, with literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing underpinning all
- Curriculum for Excellence outcomes
- Links to the four capacities
- Possible learning experiences
- Opportunities for differentiation/challenge
- Opportunities for Assessment- What skills and knowledge you are going to assess
- Activities and resources to address identified next steps in learning
## Curriculum for Excellence

### Learning in Context - Backdrop Planning Sheet/ Medium Term Planning

#### CONTEXT FOR LEARNING:
- **Final Outcome/Celebration of Learning:**

#### Which curricular areas/subjects could be covered?
- Expressive Arts
- Health and Well-Being
- Languages
- Mathematics
- Religious and Moral Education
- Sciences
- Social Studies
- Technologies

#### What learning experiences should be planned in order for children to achieve the final outcome?

#### Formative assessment opportunities / Focus Learning Outcomes:

### How this work will contribute to the four capacities (highlight)

#### Successful learners
- Use literacy, communication and numeracy skills
- Use technology for learning
- Think creativity and independently
- Learn independently and as part of a group
- Make reasoned evaluations
- Link and apply different kinds of learning in new situations

#### Responsible citizens
- Develop knowledge/understanding of the world
- Scotland’s place in it
- Understand different beliefs and cultures
- Make informed choices and decisions
- Evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues
- Develop informed, ethical views of complex issues

#### Confident individuals
- Relate to others and manage themselves
- Pursue a healthy and active lifestyle
- Be self aware
- Develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world
- Live as independently as they can
- Assess risk and take informed decisions
- Achieve success in different areas of activity

#### Effective contributors
- Communicate in different ways and in different settings
- Work in partnership and in teams
- Take the initiative and lead
- Apply critical thinking in new contexts
- Create and develop
- Solve problems
### Literacy and Numeracy - Medium Term Planning

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<tr>
<th>Outcomes – Literacy</th>
<th>Outcomes – Numeracy and Mathematics</th>
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<th>Evaluation and Next Steps</th>
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Short Term Plan

May include:

- Planned learning intentions, which are skills and knowledge based - includes indoor/outdoor experiences, adult led or adult initiated activities
- An indication of the balance between adult-led and free flow activities
- May reflect spontaneous learning opportunities that have occurred
- Differentiation
- Evaluation - asking yourself were the learning intentions fulfilled? noting children’s ideas, responses and feedback, to be incorporated into next short term plan
- Details of any planned assessments, where appropriate
- Identifying next steps in learning for individuals or groups of children
- A space to record modifications and changes to your plan.
### Weekly Learning Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Intention (including possible skills development)</th>
<th>Learning Intention (including possible skills development)</th>
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<td>Planned Learning Opportunities</td>
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<td>Group Time Activities (Adult Led)</td>
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<td>Free Flow Play Activities (Child Initiated)</td>
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<td>Outdoor Play</td>
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### Context:

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<th>Learning Intention (including possible skills development)</th>
<th>Children's Ideas</th>
<th>Imaginative Play</th>
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<td>Planned Learning Opportunities</td>
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<td>Outdoor Play</td>
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Observation / Reflection / Next Steps
**Planned Assessment**

- Decide **which** skills and knowledge are to be assessed

- Decide **how** you are going to assess - through free flow play opportunities, a planned adult led activity

- Decide how you are going to involve child in assessment - through conversation- “What did you do well?, What do you think you need to do next?, What do you like best about your...”

- Decide how you are going to record the assessment - through written observation, annotated photographs etc. It may be useful to remember that written observations should be brief and insightful. An example might be: “Ella showed she could order numbers by placing the numbered teddies from 0 to 10.” Next Steps: “Encourage Ella to use this skill in different ways-setting up the hopscotch labels outside for everyone to play”

- Decide if and how you are going to share the assessment with the parent/carer-through oral feedback, a learning story, or a picture.

- Decide how you are going to use the assessment-it should inform future planning.
## Long Term Plan
(A annual plan)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Curricular area</th>
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**Campbeltown Nursery**
Example 2

**Medium Term Planner**

**Focus of enquiry/questions/challenges**

**Outline of tasks leading to final outcome:**

**Date:**

**Context:**

**Outcomes: (codes)**

**Focused curricular areas:**
1.
2.
3.
4.

**Evaluation/next steps**

Campbeltown Nursery
Example 3

Weekly evaluation

Review of learning:

Next Steps:

Campbeltown Nursery
Weekly Planning Sheet

Date:

Context:

Learning intentions: (skills based)
1.
2.
3.

Environment for Active Learning:

Adult Led /Initiated Focused Learning:

Success Criteria
(Focus for observations):

Campbeltown Nursery

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Referencing

Useful websites
www.curriculumforexcellencesctoland.gov.uk
www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears
www.hmie.gov.uk/goodpractice
www.education.ea.argyll-bute.sch.uk
www.scottish.gov.uk/gettingitright
www.unicef.org.crc