Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Pilot Study Plan

NatCen Social Research
Fatima Husain

PROJECT TITLE	Evaluation of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) reforms pilot
DEVELOPER (INSTITUTION)	Department of Education
EVALUATOR (INSTITUTION)	NatCen Social Research
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)	Fatima Husain
STUDY PLAN AUTHOR(S)	Fatima Husain
PUPIL AGE RANGE AND KEY STAGE	4-5
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	24
NUMBER OF PUPILS	n/a - this is not a pupil level intervention

Study plan version history

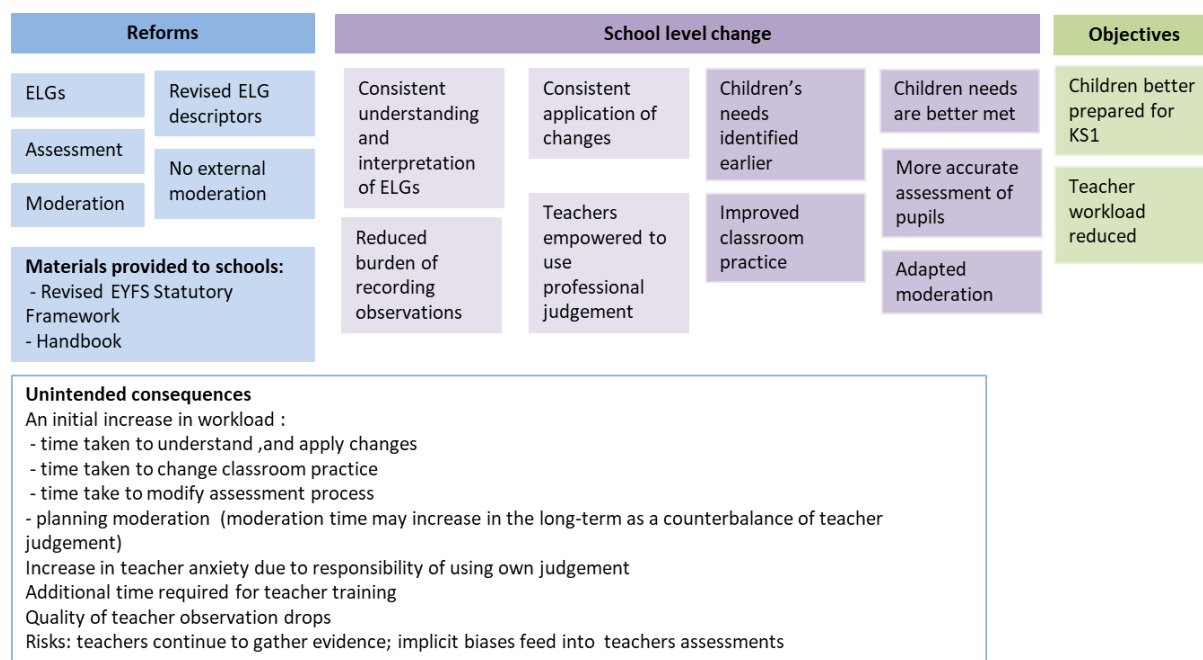| VERSION	DATE	REASON FOR REVISION
1.0	02/11/2018	

Intervention

The reforms which are being evaluated reflect the Government's commitment to improving the assessment in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) by recognising the potential to better inform teachers, support child development and narrow the disadvantage gap. The EYFS framework details the learning and development requirements for children aged 0-5. It supports a statutory assessment of a child's development and readiness for school against a set of Early Learning Goals (ELGs). The EYFSP summarises pupil attainment and the data is published at national and local authority level. Individual pupil data is used by schools to understand educational and developmental needs and to support transition to Year 1.

In 2017, following a consultation, the Government revised the ELGs in line with the latest evidence on child development and with a view to making them more clear and specific and to reduce teacher workload in relation to evidence gathering and assessment moderation.

The reforms have been developed by the Government and delivery is being support by Action for Children. The underlying logic of the EYFSP reforms and the intended change sought is set out in the logic model in Figure 1.

Figure 1: EYFSP reforms logic model

Reforms		School level change				Objectives
ELGs	Revised ELG descriptors	Consistent understanding and interpretation of ELGs	Consistent application of changes	Children's needs identified earlier	Children needs are better met	Children better prepared for KS1
Assessment	No external moderation				More accurate assessment of pupils	Teacher workload reduced
Moderation		Reduced burden of recording observations	Teachers empowered to use professional judgement	Improved classroom practice	Adapted moderation	
Materials provided to schools: - Revised EYFS Statutory Framework - Handbook						

Unintended consequences
An initial increase in workload :
 - time taken to understand ,and apply changes
 - time taken to change classroom practice
 - time take to modify assessment process
- planning moderation (moderation time may increase in the long-term as a counterbalance of teacher judgement)
Increase in teacher anxiety due to responsibility of using own judgement
Additional time required for teacher training
Quality of teacher observation drops
Risks: teachers continue to gather evidence; implicit biases feed into teachers assessments

Research questions

The objective of the evaluation is to assess the delivery of the reforms and to provide evidence and insights into how implementation can be optimised when the reforms are rolled out nationally. We propose a formative approach to:

- understand how the EYFSP reforms affect staff workload, particularly in terms of trusting teachers to use their professional judgements in assessing development
- understand the delivery (understanding and interpretation) of the new materials. These will include the EYFS statutory framework which sets out the learning and development and assessment requirements and the EYFSP handbook which sets out assessment guidance for reception teams
- explore the perceived clarity and precision of new ELGs and their descriptors and whether these facilitate or hinder assessment and moderation
- gather views on whether children are better prepared for KS1.

The detailed research questions that the evaluation is designed to respond to, along with the methods and associated indicators are set out in the table overleaf. These correspond to each outcome in the logic model rather than the EEF success criteria for pilots.

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Outcomes	Research Questions	Method	Indicator
Consistent understanding and interpretation of ELGs	Were the revised ELGs clear enough to be interpreted by participants in a consistent way? Were there any specific ELGs that were particularly clear or unclear? How could the content of these ELGs be improved to be clearer? What if anything would help to support the use of the revised ELGs and the scoring profile? (including changes to the handbook)	Autumn interviews and case studies + query log	Types of queries on AfC log Reported internal school discussions Views of the changes to ELG descriptors Interpretation of specific ELGS (using descriptors as an elicitation tool) Reported ease with which ELGs are applied to practice
Reduced burden of recording observations for assessment	How are teachers recording their observations? Is there a change in the amount of paperwork required (in comparison to previous years? What can be done to minimise the burden of recording observations?	All methods	Examples of evidence gathered (if any) Reported time spent on evidence gathering in comparison to pre-pilot
Consistent application of changes	How easy was it to build the content of the revised ELGs into the programme of learning (and in what way(s) was this done)? Where were the areas of most change for classroom practice? How were any challenges addressed?	Autumn interviews & case studies	School discussion on how to use new ELGs
Teachers empowered to use professional judgement	How confident do teachers feel about conducting assessments using the revised ELGs? What was different in the way assessment was carried out? Have there been changes in the level of autonomy exercised by teachers? What is the perceived balance between teacher autonomy and oversight (i.e. moderation)	Case studies and end point interviews	Teacher reports of change in how much evidence is gathered Perceived confidence in using new ELG descriptors Perceptions of autonomy
Children's needs identified earlier	In what way did the ELGs help to identify children's needs (earlier)? How does this compare with what happened previously?	Case studies and end point interviews	Reported examples of using ELGS to identify needs earlier
Improved classroom practice	In what ways has classroom practice changed in relation to the 17 ELGs? What specifically is done differently? How do early year leads/coordinators maintain consistency (if more than one Reception teacher)? What additional guidance, if any, would teachers find useful?	Case studies and end point interviews	Examples of improvements and challenges in the classroom in the application of ELGs
Children better supported in EYFS	Did the content of the ELGS help to better teach and support children? What changes were put in place to better support children? How has support for SEND and emerging SEND pupils changed?	Case studies and summer interviews	Reported examples of ways in which support has improved
More accurate assessment of pupils	Do teachers feel that the revised ELGs enabled them to make an accurate assessment of child's development (including a child with SEND), and was this considered to be more accurate than when using the previous ELGs descriptors? - If so, were there any particular ELGs for which this was the case, and why? - Were there any particular ELGs which did not enable an accurate assessment of development or which were less accurate than the previous ELGs, and why? What were the reasons for variations, if any, between participating schools and/or teachers? Is there anything that would help to make a more accurate summative assessment of development?	Summer interviews + query log	Teacher perceptions on accuracy when using ELGs for assessment
Adapted moderation	What do teachers think of statutory moderation by LAs (retrospective)? How helpful did they find statutory moderation? What forms of moderation has the school conducted in the past? What is planned for moderation during the pilot? How has this affected accuracy and workload? How was moderation conducted during the pilot? What would be the preferred type(s) of moderation? What type of additional support or guidance would schools want to help them with moderation?	All methods + query log	Views on LA and other forms of moderation (retrospective) Planning for moderation Examples of moderation during pilot Views on continuing moderation in assessment
Children better prepared for KS 1	To what extent do teachers feel that children were better prepared for KS1? How was the profile used during handover to KS1 teachers?	Summer interviews	Perceptions of KS1 teachers (not in scope) Teachers descriptions of handover
Teacher workload reduced	Are teachers spending less time on assessment, recording evidence and moderation, than previously?	Survey and summer interviews	Reported estimates of time spent on assessment pre-pilot and during pilot

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Methods – delivery of the pilot

Recruitment

The Department for Education recruited 24 schools to take part in the pilot. These schools are diverse, covering both rural and urban areas in England. In the sample provided by the Department, the breakdown of schools by FSM eligibility and the number of reception classes is as follows:

School sample		FSM High (more than 20%)	FSM Med (10-20%)	FSM low (less than 10%)	FSM Unknown	Total
No of reception classes	1	1	5	3	1	10
	2	3	0	3		6
	3+	0	2	1		3
	Not stated	3	1	1		5
	Total	7	8	8	1	24

This is a whole class intervention that all Reception year teachers apply to their practice. A privacy notice has been issued by the DfE and this will be communicated to the parents of all reception year children at the start of the school year in September 2018.

All schools will receive a £50 book token at the end conclusion of the study.

Data collection

A phased data collection approach that gathers both breadth and depth of data on the implementation of the reforms is proposed. The methods used are detailed below.

Presenting at AfC events
The regional events organised by Action for Children (AfC) present an important opportunity to gather observational data. We will present the research at these events and observe the discussions taking place. We will inform school staff about the nature and purpose of the research. This will be in the form of a short presentation to attendees and the distribution of research information leaflets and the privacy notice.

Discussion points and queries raised by school staff will be thematically collated to inform subsequent stages of the research and the content of research instruments. We will inform school staff about the nature and purpose of the research.

Baseline data
Immediately following the first AfC event with headteachers, we will administer an online survey to all schools. We would expect either the EYFS coordinator or a reception year teacher, and the headteacher to complete the survey. The survey will aim to capture a perspective on current delivery of the EYFSP. In addition to general questions about school staff in EYFS, questions will relate to four key areas:
- Time taken to conduct current assessment and views on level of evidence required
- Types of moderation currently conducted as standard practice and the amount of time involved for each approach.

- Use of ELGS to identify needs (including) SEND and emerging SEND
- Perspectives on accuracy of assessment and preparedness of pupils for KS1.

The survey will include 3-4 open ended questions and take roughly 10-15 minutes to complete. The invitation and reminder emails will be sent to the lead contact in each school. The survey will take place in early July closing at the end of the school year.

On-going delivery

To study implementation of the reforms, we propose a longitudinal qualitative design to capture implementation at different points in time during the 2018/2019 school year. Our design will comprise the following:

*Autumn term***:** telephone interviews with the lead reception teacher or the EYFS coordinator in each school. These interviews will explore how schools are progressing with the early implementation of the reforms and to assess whether any issues encountered are 'teething problems' or point to potential problems with the reforms.

Twenty four telephone interviews lasting up to 50 minutes will be conducted covering the thematic categories set out above in relation to the core aspects of the reforms.

Early Summer term: case studies comprising school visits will be conducted in a sub-sample of schools. The purpose will be to explore how the reforms are 'bedding down', whether initial 'teething' problems have been addressed and to explore staff's understanding of the ELG descriptors, preparations for assessment and overall understanding of what the reforms are trying to achieve. Staff views on how the reforms can be optimised will be collected also.

Analysis of the interview data from the autumn term will support our sampling approach which will include also a consideration of key sampling criteria agreed with the DfE. A purposive sample of eight schools will be identified for in-depth data collection.

Case study development will include a site visit to conduct up to three interviews with Reception year teachers and teaching assistants (or a small group discussion if possible). We will aim to interview the headteacher in each school also. We will seek to use EYFSP documentation as elicitation tools to facilitate discussion and to assess understanding and clarity of the ELG descriptors. In total around 24 interviews will be conducted.

These will be conducted at the start of the summer term, when schools have started planning for assessment. We have an extended timeframe for developing the case studies so that we can accommodate school and teachers' availability and ensure that case studies are conducted once schools have started discussing and planning for assessment.

Late Summer term: We will replicate the approach used in the autumn term. Telephone interviews, lasting no longer than 45 minutes, will be conducted with the Reception year teacher or the EYFS Coordinator in each school (24 in total) to gain insights into how assessment and moderation were conducted using the new guidance. These will be conducted in July 2019.

Query log

AfC will log all queries about the reforms submitted by schools to AfC. This log will remain live from the day after the headteacher event through to the end of the school year in July 2019. To carry out thematic analysis of schools queries and AfC responses, we will seek access to the log at four points in time: in early September and December, 2018 and in March and July 2019.

Method- cognitive sub-study

A distinct component of the study will gather in-depth data from teachers on their understanding of the ELGs. The aims of the sub-study will be to assess how teachers:
- understand and interpret the reformed ELG descriptors, and
- make 'best fit judgements' when assessing children across the three profile outcomes: Emerging, Expected, and Exceeding.

Recruitment

This research will be conducted in 16 pilot schools. These will be schools that have not been selected for case study research (see above).

Data collection

Data collection will be conducted in two phases.

Spring term

Face-to-face cognitive interviews will be conducted with one teacher in each school (16 interviews in total). These interviews each lasting 1.5 hours will focus on capturing teachers' early interpretations of all 17 ELGs and what information is being collected to evidence a child's progress. A core set of cognitive probes will be used during each interview and for each ELG descriptor and each bullet point within each ELG.

End of school year

In-depth interviews – either face-to-face or via skype - will gather post-assessment reflections on using ELGS, a sub-sample of eight schools will be selected. Teachers will be asked to do a 'walk through' 1-2 assessment that they have completed and discuss how they made 'best fit' judgements.

Data analysis and synthesis

Qualitative data will be analysed using Framework. A layered approach to data analysis will be undertaken. Each phase of data collection will be analysed by school and respondent type. Analysed data will be triangulated to provide a descriptive narrative of the delivery of the reforms. Survey data will be analysed in SPSS to produce frequency tables and cross tabulations of key variables. Analysis will consider the types of challenges encountered, difference between delivery approaches and aspects of the reforms that worked well and were easier to implement.

The final phase of evidence synthesis will involve collation and triangulation of all data to respond to the evaluation research questions and provide a commentary on the themes and implementation domains which are the focus of the study. It will draw out the key requirements for optimising implementation.

For the cognitive interviews, a discourse analysis approach will focus on responses to cognitive probes, interpretations, and meaning making of ELG descriptors. Data on explanations of 'best fit' judgements and collection of evidence will be coded alongside. Longitudinal synthesis analysis will uncover differences in interpretation from early understanding to application in practice.

Ethics and registration

Ethical approval was granted by NatCen's Research Ethics Committee.

DfE are the data controller and NatCen, subcontracted by EEF are the data processor. The lawful basis for processing is public task as and a privacy notice has been issued by the DfE and shared with school staff. In September 2018 schools will be asked to share the privacy notice with the parents/carers of all reception year pupils.

All data collected for this study will be kept securely. We will safeguard the anonymity of all participants and no school, staff member or pupil will be named in any outputs or reports. School or pupils that decide that they no longer want to take part in the study may on request have their data deleted at any point and prior to the submission of a draft report to the EEF.

Personnel

The study will be delivered by the Children and Families team. The study will be led by Dr Fatima Husain (Research Director) who will be responsible for quality assurance and overall management of the study and delivery requirements. Sandy Chidley (Senior Researcher) who will be responsible for the day-today delivery of the evaluation. Sandy will be supported by Tanya Basi and Phoebe Averill (Researchers). The research lead for the cognitive sub-study will be Dr Ruxandra Comanaru, Head of the Cognitive Testing Hub at NatCen. Tanya Basi will be the day-today project manager and will work closely with Catherin Fenton, Researcher, Cognitive Testing Hub, and the rest of the research team.

Risks

The main risks to the project are set out in the table.

Risk	Likelihood / Impact	Mitigation/Contingency
Headteachers not engaging with the research at the start of the study	**Likelihood:** Low **Impact:** Medium	We will ensure that the MoU includes details about the requirements of the evaluation. We will also work closely with AfC so that headteachers are aware of the evaluation timetable and are willing to find the time to take part in interviews, ideally presenting this at the first event organised by AfC. In our experience, telephone interviews with senior school staff are an appropriate data collection approach.
Lack of success in gaining access to school staff	**Likelihood:** Low **Impact:** High	We will seek to identify a key contact in each school to support the research and facilitate access to school staff. We will work in close collaboration with AfC and seek their support if we struggle to engage school staff.
School staff do not complete the survey	**Likelihood:** Low **Impact:** Medium	As per other EEF studies, we have proposed an on-line approach. The survey fieldwork period will be sufficiently long to allow staff to complete the survey at a time suitable to them. We will also ensure the survey is no longer than 10-12 minutes. Reminders will be sent through our key contact in each school.
Schools drop out of the pilot	**Likelihood:** Low **Impact:** Low	This is a formative study mainly using qualitative methods. We will give schools advance notice of research activities and arrange interviews and visits to suit availability and the school day. We will work closely with AfC to address any school concerns about research burden.

Timeline

Date	Activity

June/July 2018	Attend events for school staff organised by Action for Children
July 2018	Schools sign MoU
July 2018	Baseline data collected
October- November 2018	Autumn term interviews with school staff
February - March 2019	Spring term cognitive interviews
April-May 2019	School case studies fieldwork
July 2019	End of year interviews with school staff
July 2019	Post-assessment interviews (cognitive sub-study)
September 2019	Presentation of early findings
September 2019	Draft report submitted
October 2019	Report finalised for publication