November 2014



**Say ‘no’ to baseline assessment:**

***What can you do?***

**Lobbying support pack**

TACTYC members can influence policy among decision-makers who may not fully understand nor value early years. With a general election on the horizon, and new early years and education ministers in post, there is a window of opportunity to ensure there is another look at this proposal, supported by informed professional voices.

In addition to this pack, you might like to draw on

TACTYC Baseline Position Statement <http://tactyc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TACTYC-Baseline-position-paper.pdf>

TACTYC Baseline summary <http://tactyc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TACTYC-Baseline-summary.docx>

**Who could you contact?**

* **Your local MP**
  + You can find contact details for your local MP at <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/>
  + **Write a letter** Even if they do not have direct responsibility, MPs will pass on letters to the relevant minister. (see sample letter below)
  + **Visit your MP’s local surgery or arrange a meeting to discuss your concerns.**

You could write in advance as a TACTYC member, describing your own professional expertise, and outlining what you want to discuss. Follow up to make a date with the diary secretary. Prepare with three or four main points you want to make. Keep notes at the meeting, and follow up with a letter reinforcing the points made, and include supporting material you would like to send (such as the TACTYC Baseline Position Statement).

* **Organisations where you have links**
  + **Unions** (NUT, NAHT, ASPECT, VOICE, NASUWT, ATL, etc)

The head teachers union (NAHT) has so far supported the baseline plans as a way to show progress through primary schools; there is a need to explain how a primary-based approach is invalid and harmful in the early years. The NUT is considering a mass boycott of the baseline as harmful to children’s education.

* + **Schools**

Individual schools will decide whether to continue with the holistic EYFS Profile when it is made non-statutory in September 2016, and whether to use one of the approved baseline tests.

* + **Parents groups**

Parents have a strong voice which politicians take seriously, and may add pressure when they are informed about the nature and implications of the baseline assessment.

**Getting press coverage**

You could help to raise the issue, alerting the public including parents and schools about the baseline plans.

**Press release**

TACTYC is issuing a press release, but you could obtain greater coverage by sending a press release to any local contacts or other media connections you may have. It would help to think about a local angle – for example, a report that you are writing to local schools to ask them to boycott the baseline (and then send letters to schools!). You might even be able to quote some local parents of young children who don’t want their child tested at such a young age.

* You could ring or email a named reporter or newsdesk editor in advance to check deadlines for getting into weekly papers.
* Draft a press release (see model sample below which you can modify as you wish)
* If possible send the press release to local contacts 1-2 days before so they can plan for deadlines.
* Consider following up with a phone call to check if the paper plans to cover the story and to check they have all the information they need.

**An example of a letter to your MP**

Dear XXX

I am very concerned about the current government plans to introduce a standardised baseline test for all children as soon as they start school. This major shift in the assessment of young children carries significant risks both for the education and well-being of children in the critical early years, and for their strengths as learners in their futures.

Testing children in this way will be unreliable, because children at such a young age will not show their true abilities in a test with a teacher they do not yet know and trust, and in a formal situation.

The tests also will not accurately predict future progress, since they will be based on narrow checklists of basic skills and knowledge. They cannot show the factors that really underpin children’s continued learning and development, such as attitudes and dispositions which research shows are critical to children’s later achievement and capacity to learn.

But the strongest reason to oppose the baseline assessment is that it would be harmful to effective practice and therefore to children’s learning and development. It will put pressure on practitioners to ‘teach to the test’, distorting the curriculum and detracting from the rich physical, exploratory, playful, creative, and intellectual experiences which research shows benefit children in the early years. It will also undermine the important links with parents in working together to provide rich learning experiences in school and at home.

I am attaching further information on this issue *(e.g.TACTYC Baseline Position Paper,Summary)/* would value the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my concerns and alternative approaches to assessment which research shows support young children’s learning and well-being.

I hope you will be willing to speak up to stop the moves to baseline assessment and to support principled, informed approaches for the early years.

Yours sincerely

***Your contact details***

**Say ‘no’ to baseline assessment**

**Press release**

**date**

**[ADD A TITLE – A HEADLINE ABOUT YOUR NEWS STORY]**

[Tell the news story in a few paragraphs. Put the most important point which makes it newsworthy first. If possible add a quote or two to support the arguments for assessment that is appropriate for children in the early years – from parents, teachers, academics, etc.]

**[Give your contact including phone number for further information]**

[Contact TACTYC if you’d like a comment in support of your story from a national organisation]

**Notes to editors:**

1. The government is planning a major shift in the assessment of young children, Standardised baseline tests are being developed in order to judge effectiveness of primary schools, to be administered to young children in their first three weeks of starting school.
2. The move is opposed by early years experts, who argue that it carries significant risks both for the education and well-being of children in the early years and for their strengths as learners in their futures. TACTYC, the Association for the Professional Development of Early Years Educators says that this form of standardised baseline assessment would be:

* **Unreliable.** Children at such a young age will not show their true abilities in a test taken out of the context of familiar relationships and practical experiences;
* **Invalid.** The tests will be based on narrow checklists of basic skills and knowledge which do not take account of the different ways and rates at which children learn and develop, nor of the ability of children to build conceptual understanding and apply their knowledge. They will not include attitudes and dispositions which research shows are critical to children’s later achievement and capacity to learn.
* **Harmful to effective practice and therefore to children’s learning and development.** The assessment will result in pressure on practitioners to ‘teach to the test’, distorting the curriculum and detracting from the rich physical, exploratory, playful, creative, and intellectual experiences which research shows benefit children in the early years;
* **Harmful to the home learning environment and parent partnership.**  Parents will be misdirected in terms of the most important markers of their child’s progress and attainment, toward supporting narrow measures rather than engaging in the responsive, playful interactions which best support children’s well-being and learning.

1. The Department for Education intends to introduce baseline assessment of children on entry to full-time school, in reception classes for children aged four. Use of approved commercially produced baseline tests will be optional for schools from September 2015, and from September 2016 these tests will be the only measures used for judging progress through primary school in Ofsted inspections although schools can choose to be judged by challenging floor standards instead. The National Union of Teachers is considering a boycott of baseline assessment.
2. The use of the currently statutory Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), which is not a test but a rounded assessment of children’s development based on observation over time, is to become optional from September 2016.
3. TACTYC recommends maintaining current assessment approaches, based on observation of children over time in all their activities including play. Parents’ perspectives should be included, and the focus should include personal, social and emotional development, communication and language and physical development as well as children’s motivation, approaches to learning, self-regulation and resilience.
4. Further information is available in the TACTYC position paper *Say ‘no’ to baseline assessment* http://tactyc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TACTYC-Baseline-position-paper.pdf