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Open Letter – April 2016 Better without Baseline Coalition**  
**The Better Without Baseline coalition** welcomes the government’s decision to abandon the planned baseline assessment system for school accountability purposes, but many of our fundamental concerns remain. The government acknowledges that the lack of data comparability between the approved schemes means the system simply will not work, but it remains committed to measuring pupil progress through primary school and will be considering other options.

We urge a constructive re-think, including serious engagement with the issues raised in the sustained argument and evidence against baseline assessment that we have presented from teaching unions, early years organisations, researchers and parents.

Any assessment system should be founded on protecting and promoting children’s well-being, recognising the holistic nature of children’s development in their early years. The Early Years Foundation Stage offers a tried and tested basis for understanding and supporting children's learning through observation so that practitioners can work with all of children's talents and interests, and best meet their learning and development needs. Reception teachers already use well-established EYFS approaches to assess and record children’s progress, continuing for children aged 4-5 with the same kind of detailed assessments that have been supporting their learning since they entered early education at age 2, 3 or even younger.

Unfortunately, the DfE appears to be disregarding plentiful evidence that baseline schemes represent

* **a waste of public money in a time of austerity**
* **a waste of teachers’ valuable time**
* **disruption to the settling-in period in the reception year**
* **potential damage by attaching simplistic labels to children**
* **a narrowed curriculum focus with potential negative effects on children’s early experiences and on parental involvement and confidence**
* **an inability to provide an accurate or useful picture of children’s current development or to predict their future attainment.**

For the next academic year, the DfE is encouraging schools to use a commercial baseline scheme for on-entry assessment and will continue to pay for it, on the mistaken assumption that this will add to teachers’ ability to identify and meet the needs of their pupils. If schools opt to use these schemes, there will be needless increase in the millions of pounds already wasted on this flawed policy.

We remain opposed to the reintroduction of on-entry assessments such as these when there are far better ways for teachers to get to know and understand the learning needs of children new to school. We question the reasoning behind inserting an accountability measure into the beginning of the reception year, when large numbers of children will already have been receiving EYFS education in the school from age two or three.

The coalition opposes the DfE’s plan to make the EYFS Profile non-statutory after this year.  Although no assessment tool is perfect, the EYFSP remains a widely respected, meaningful and practical assessment, and should be retained at least until a clear, principled and effective improvement can be introduced.

We note that the DfE intends to begin a process of engagement with stakeholders around issues of early years assessment. We look forward to participating in these discussions, and will continue to press for policies which are based on firm evidence and made in the best interests of young children.

**LETTER SIGNATORIES**

**Wendy Ellyatt  
Chief Executive, Save Childhood Movement (SCM)  
  
Wendy Scott, OBE  
President, TACTYC, Association for Professional Development in the Early Years**

**Nancy Stewart  
Vice Chair, TACTYC, Association for Professional Development in the Early Years   
  
Cathy Nutbrown**

**Professor of Education, The University of Sheffield  
  
Christine Blower  
General Secretary, NUT  
  
Mary Bousted  
General Secretary, Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)**

**Beatrice Merrick  
Chief Executive, British Association for Early Childhood Education (Early Education)**

**Melian Mansfield  
Chair, Early Childhood Form (ECF)  
  
Lynn Hannay  
Chair, National Association for Primary Education (NAPE)**

**Neil Leitch  
Chief Executive, Pre-School Learning Alliance (PSLA)**

**Purnima Tanuku OBE**

**Chief Executive, National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)**

**Liz Bayram**

**Chief Executive, Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY)  
  
June O’Sullivan  
Chief Executive, London Early Years Foundation**

**Dr Richard House  
Chair, Early Childhood Action (ECA)**

**Marie Peacock  
Chair, Mothers at Home Matter (MAHM)  
  
Lydia Keyte  
Chair, What about the Children? (WATCH)**

**Dr David Whitebread  
Senior Lecturer in Developmental Psychology & Early Childhood Education**

**University of Cambridge   
  
Dr Pam Jarvis  
Senior Lecturer, Institute of Childhood and Education, Leeds Trinity University  
  
Sara Tomlinson  
Steering Committee, Primary Charter  
  
Emeritus Professor Margaret Clark, OBE  
Newman University, Birmingham**

**Professor Terry Wrigley  
Reclaiming Schools Network**