

# EAL Assessment and Evaluation Framework

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## Introduction

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The National Curriculum does not provide a dedicated English as an Additional Language (EAL) assessment framework. Teachers have been doing their best to assess the English Language proficiencies of pupils from linguistically diverse backgrounds by using various locally produced assessment schemes and A Language In Common (QCA, 2000). The latter essentially comprises the mainstream English (subject) attainment levels with modifications at Level 1. It has been well recognised by teachers working with pupils from diverse language backgrounds that there are sound educational reasons for a dedicated EAL assessment framework, particularly in the light of the official expectation that all schools should have well-informed assessment practices designed to promote all individual pupils' achievement.

The Bell Foundation is funding an eighteen-month EAL assessment project. The aim of the project is to produce a research-based and practice-informed assessment framework comprising separate rating scales for primary and secondary phases, guidance of use for teachers and schools, and curriculum/subject-related sample assessment tasks. It is envisaged that practitioner advice will play a significant part in the development of this assessment framework. The assessment framework will recognise the wide range of pupil background educational experiences and proficiencies in language(s) in an increasingly mobile and diverse school population. The aim of the framework is to enhance the overall quality of educational provision for pupils with EAL.

The members of this project team are:

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The project team will work with an Advisory Panel including Kim Baker (Luton Borough Authority), Mike Milanovitch (Trustee – The Bell Foundation), Manny Vasquez, (Hounslow Language Service), and staff representatives from The Bell Foundation.

Further details and updates on progress will be provided on The Bell Foundation and NALDIC websites from time to time.

A summary of the guiding principles adopted by the project team is provided below. The team would welcome comments on these principles from teachers. Please email: [constant.leung@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:constant.leung@kcl.ac.uk)

# Guiding principles of English as an Additional Language assessment

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## 1 An assessment and evaluation framework for EAL

Collecting evidence to support EAL learners as they improve their proficiency in English should take account of individual and contextual factors. An EAL assessment and evaluation framework should support an evidence-based approach to assessing progress and to promote learning, where evidence comes from multiple sources, including formal and informal assessment. Such an approach should have both quantitative and qualitative aspects: measurement of progress against a well-defined scale combined with careful description of individual pupils' knowledge, background experience and skills profile.

Such a framework must provide an orientation for learners and teachers as to each EAL learner's starting point, current level and potential development. Any EAL assessment framework should provide robust indicators of a learner's profile of English language knowledge and skills, strengths to build on and weaknesses to address.

The notion of progression in proficiency is fundamental, whether we use terms such as 'standards', 'levels', 'phases' or 'stages'. The notion of progression allows a global scale against which all unique learner profiles can be evaluated, and which enables the development of a common understanding among practitioners. This is valuable for a range of teaching and administrative purposes, including curriculum development and teacher professional development.

An assessment framework for EAL should thus comprise both global measures and measures or evaluations of a range of aspects of language proficiency, relevant to the situation of EAL pupils. The framework should contain illustration of pupil achievement through performance exemplars that characterise standards or levels in particular knowledge and skills. The complementary roles of classroom assessment and psychometric tests should be considered.

## 2 Key principles for an EAL assessment and evaluation framework

The following principles can be used to ensure that the impact of the assessment and evaluation framework is positive and effective.

### 2.1 Every EAL learner should achieve their full potential

EAL assessment should aim at ensuring that all learners achieve their full potential, with particular reference to English Language development. The assessment and evaluation framework should be primarily formative in purpose. It should indicate

what a pupil can do, inform curriculum provision, and enable diagnosis of needs and individualisation of learning, so as to promote potential development.

## **2.2 Every EAL learner has a unique profile**

EAL learners are a heterogeneous group and each EAL learner has a unique profile which reflects the influence of the following factors:

- Age
- First language educational history
- First language literacy
- English language proficiency
- English-medium schooling experience
- Academic track record
- Family and community circumstances.

EAL assessment should take full account of profile factors in the following ways:

### **Age**

Age should be taken into account because it strongly influences the kind of cognitive operations and/or communicative uses of language which it is reasonable to expect of a child at particular stages, other things being equal. A pupil first entering English-medium education at age 5 is likely to have very different social and curriculum communication needs to a pupil entering at age 14. EAL assessment should capture this in its performance descriptors.

### **First language educational history**

EAL pupils arrive in the UK at different ages and with different life experiences. They may have studied to a level where they understand much of the content of a school subject, and may also be familiar with the notion that particular academic subjects adopt particular modes of discourse. A pupil's first language educational history can be seen as an indication of first language development (see first language literacy below) and prior curriculum attainment.

### **First language literacy**

If EAL pupils are literate in their first language, this will likely facilitate acquiring literacy in English. EAL assessment should make every effort to gather information on pupils' first language literacy, which can be used to inform expectations of progress.

### **Academic track record**

Like all pupils, EAL pupils will vary in their academic track record, in general and in relation to particular subjects. On starting school in the UK their academic track record should be evaluated as far as possible taking account of any language difficulties (see 'initial profiling' under 2.3 below). This information can help teachers make informed decisions on target setting and programmes of work.

### **Individual and family circumstances**

EAL pupils' propensities for learning can be influenced by a variety of individual and family circumstances within the local community context. EAL assessment should

take account of information on relevant issues such as giftedness, Free School Meal, and Special Educational Needs & Disability where appropriate; these issues can impact on pupils' academic performance and language learning. EAL assessment should also track pupils' dispositions towards learning over time as an important aspect of the pupil's profile.

### **2.3 Assessment and evaluation serve multiple purposes**

Any EAL assessment should, at a minimum, include an initial profiling system and rating scales of performance. It must provide different forms of evidence, to serve the following functions:

#### **Initial profiling**

Section 2.2 above listed the key features of the profile of an EAL learner. Most of these can be established initially through interview, with the learner and/or a parent (with interpreter support where appropriate); current state of English language proficiency might be determined by a suitably trained teacher, with reference to performance exemplars and descriptors adopted by school/LA, as well as through more formal assessment. Previous academic track record in particular subjects should be evaluated as far as possible taking account of language differences and/or difficulties.

#### **Informing expectations**

The initial profiling should reveal strengths as well as areas of need. It should provide the school with a clear expectation of what the pupil can achieve and what specific issues to address. Over time careful observation of the trajectories of EAL pupils with particular profiles, facilitated by an appropriate assessment framework, should enable better understanding of what can be achieved, and setting of appropriate targets.

#### **Orientation**

As already noted, any assessment framework must provide an orientation for both pupils and teachers as to each EAL pupil's starting point, current level and possible goals: where did we start, where are we now and where are we going? This is essential information for pupils if they are to take responsibility for their learning. It requires that there are clear criteria for assessment and decision-making, ensuring that pupils' use of English can be evaluated in terms of real-world communicative abilities.

#### **Feedback into learning**

A fundamental purpose of an assessment framework is to bring about better learning. The rating scales should provide indicators of the pathways of development. These pathways should inform feedback at various levels, to individual pupils and to teachers. This feedback should distinguish language issues from conceptual /content issues, and indicate where individuals might best focus attention. Evidence should inform teachers in terms of possible progression to assist pupils in becoming better at learning and more autonomous.

### Feedback for management

An EAL assessment framework should provide information on pupil achievement and progress that can be aggregated for use by management and policy makers (as well as pupils and teachers): global indicators of learning progress and outcomes of EAL pupils. This information should be used for curriculum planning and development.

## 3 Key criteria for evaluating EAL assessment frameworks and rating scales

### 3.1 Progression:

- Does the framework clearly differentiate the stages of progression in acquiring English?
- Does the framework take account of differentiation in rate of progress in the different language skills, e.g. speaking, listening?
- Does the framework identify progression in terms of communication (i.e. using English to convey meaning in context)?
- Does the framework identify progression in terms of formal accuracy? Is account taken of the differences of age in early stage learners of English and how this will affect their use of English? Is this reflected in how the frameworks are constructed?
- Does the framework accommodate evidence of pupils' unsuccessful attempts at language use as part of the overall assessment of progress?
- Does the framework provide an orientation for learners and teachers which stimulates the development of learning autonomy?

### 3.2 Language focus:

- Does the framework distinguish between informal use of English (social interaction) and formal use (as in some formal teaching in school contexts)?
- What view of vocabulary and grammar is adopted (functional, or formal approaches) ?
- Are grammar points prioritised, and if so on what basis?
- Are issues related to social and cultural conventions of language use, e.g. politeness and formality, taken into account?
- Does the framework refer to different registers and styles of English language use?

- Does the framework draw attention to the differences between spoken and written English used for different social and academic purposes?
- Does the framework refer to different genres, e.g. related to subject-specific discourse?

### **3.3 Language across the curriculum**

- Are there guidelines for assessing English in the context of different subject disciplines, e.g. on distinguishing between language-based and subject-related cognitive difficulties?
- How are the linguistic aspects of curriculum subjects recognised, e.g. in terms of vocabulary, grammar, functional use, or specific classroom interactions?
- Is there guidance on the development of the different language skills in the context of subject-related language use?

### **3.4 Supporting materials and guidelines**

- Is there guidance for teachers on the use of the rating scales, for instance, on avoiding an excessively rigid and linear view of progression?
- Are there guidelines for assessing English in the context of different subject disciplines in the curriculum?
- Are there useful exemplifications of evidence of EAL linguistic or social classroom behaviour which can be indicative of different stages of learning and language competence?

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