

Section 1

Across Wales the Foundation Phase Framework has been introduced to replace the current National Curriculum, with 7 areas of learning it is said by Early Years Wales (2020) that children will be given more opportunity to learn in fun, exciting and stimulating environments both indoor and outdoors. The areas of learning are to be studies in a cross-curricular manner during the 4 years of Foundation Phase.

In 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government began the implementation of the new holistic play-based learning continuum for children. Donaldson (2015) explains how the Foundation Phase is a statutory curriculum for all children ages 3-7 in Wales, the Foundation Phase was designed to provide a developmental, experiential, play-based approach to both teaching and learning. In commissioning a review of the Curriculum arrangements the Welsh Government recognised the importance of being able to support the individual child to their present needs and equip them for their future lives. Wales desire is to ensure that all children benefit from relevant and high-quality provision. Surveys conducted internationally by the OECS's PISA highlighted the significant differences on performance between countries. Maynard *et al* (cited in European Education Research Association, 2013) explain how making a departure from the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum which is more formal and extensive teaching before the age of six years old can result in lower standards. The Foundation Phase is said to have been developed on evidence from early years programmes with the sociocultural view of learning in countries all around the world but the countries that were highlighted were, Scandinavia, Reggio Emilia, and New Zealand (Te Whariki) which promotes an experiential learning and emphasises the significance of children's well-being. The European Education Research Association (2013) suggest that in recent years there has been growing recognition for the importance of children's first years to determine and shape their educational achievements, many countries across Europe have developed a new and innovative curriculum for early years, however, there are studies such as Harris & Graham (2018) which fully evaluates the impact of the curriculum, the studies show that typically a reform is difficult to achieve because reforms are usually introduced nationally and rarely piloted. The Foundation Phase emphasises on a play-based learning approach which involves both child-initiated, and teacher supported learning, it is said by The Lego Foundation (2017) that play leads to deeper learning due to children being intrinsically motivated to play. However, according to reports such as Welsh Government (2015), Welsh Government (2014a) and Welsh Government (2014b) certain areas within the Foundation Phase show inconsistencies, these include a play-based curriculum, teacher & practitioner training as well as funding.

Maynard *et al*, (2016) (cited in The Foundation Phase in Wales – time to grow up?) argues that for The Foundation Phase to work effectively practitioners will have to change their behaviour in order to support the play-based, child-initiated learning, firstly practitioners will need to identify what is meant by the terminology of play. In addition Wood and Attfield (2016) (cited in Waters, J. 2016) claims that 'play' is not easily defined. The Welsh Government (2014a) evaluation reports showed that most practitioners understood the Foundation Phase to be child-centred, practical,

experiential, and child-led, while also understanding the Foundation Phase to be learning through play. The play-based pedagogy found that in many non-maintained settings prior to the implementation of the Foundation Phase was inadequate in supporting and developing children's learning as they rarely included planned play. The Stocktake (cited in Welsh Government 2014a) noted that maintained schools had not been able to implement the Foundation Phase successfully, returning to the more formal methods of teaching. The Welsh Government (2014a) suggest that there needs to be clear communication strategies that ensures all relevant stakeholders are aware of any developments within the Foundation Phase which must include an appropriate balance between focussed and independent learning and developing a play-based environment within the classroom and outside. A study conducted by Siraj-Blatchford *et al*, (cited in Welsh Government 2014a) evaluated the implementation on the Foundation Phase in maintained and non-maintained settings, the report found that the quality of teaching and learning was much greater in maintained setting than in funded non-maintained settings, the practitioners were more likely to nurture children's intellectual development as well as the social-emotional wellbeing. Similarly, Sylva *et al* (cited in Welsh Government 2014a) found similar findings such as the qualifications of practitioners appearing to determine the quality of provision. However, stockholder perceptions found a number of positive findings which were linked to the Foundation Phase such as the impact on educational experiences through better management and organisation, better opportunities, and improved learning environments. Additionally, they added that practitioners told them the curriculum was more supportive of the children's learning as it was more child centred and based on a play pedagogy. The Welsh Government (2014a) suggest that to enable and effective roll out of the Foundation Phase, practitioners and school staff should receive training to fully understand and familiarise them selves with the principles and practise of the Foundation Phase. Bauer (cited in Challenges in Early Childhood Education, no date) argues that play based learning is a vital aspect to learning within an early year setting, however when considering a play-based curriculum there a number of challenges such as advocating for play, planning, assessment, and resourcing. During research Bauer (cited in Challenges in Early Childhood Education, no date) found that teachers were feeling pressure with the rising play-based curriculum, the evidence showed that educators do not fully understand how to support and interpret children's play activities.

Donaldson (2015) (cited in Welsh Government, 2015) proposed in his Successful Futures report that training is an integral part of a successful delivery of the Foundation Phase, teachers and support staff must receive adequate time to plan and prepare for the changes while developing their skills and confidence. School staff must be given the opportunity to attend substantial training programmes to develop their knowledge and understanding, theoretically and practically. In order to support the Foundation Phase successfully The Welsh Government (2014a) stocktake compiled a list of 23 recommendations, within the recommendations supporting a 10-year strategic plan there are considerations for training and support to be provided for teachers and practitioners within the Foundation Phase. Hopkins (2013) (cited in Welsh Government 2014a) stated that the training must relate directly to the Foundation Phase to enhance the quality of teaching. Evaluating the Foundation Phase: Annual Report 2011/12

(Taylor *et al*, 2013) and Evaluating the Foundation Phase: The Outcomes of Foundation Phase Pupils (Report 1) (Davies *et al*, 2013) (cited in Welsh Government 2014a) reported that there was mainly a positive attitude to the Foundation Phase by advisors who suggested that training is an important aspect, however there was mixed reviews on the implementation which is suggested to be the decentralisation of support and training. In addition, the report is said to have found that school staff considered absenteeism. The Foundation Phase Action Plan (2006) (cited in Estyn, 2010) sets out on an agenda for training programmes across the school settings to ensure that practitioners have the correct pedagogical skills to successfully implement the Foundation Phase. Estyn (2010) found that very few local authorities offer specific training to headteachers in the Foundation Phase, this is said to be a cause of concern as headteachers do not get offered enough training to evaluate the effectiveness of the new teaching and learning approaches in developing children's learning. Additionally, according to Siraj-Blatchford *et al*, (2013) report findings showed that early year's staff need additional support developing their understanding and knowledge on their pedagogical content in the domains of the Early Years Goals. Siraj (2015) (cited in Waters, J. 2016) proposed that practitioners within Foundation Phase settings as well as leaders would benefit from on training with a specific focus on the understanding of theory and practice implications and the development of appropriate pedagogies that support progression for children. Moving forward Siraj (2015) (cited in Waters, J. 2016) suggested that the training provided for staff would likely enhance the adult role in supporting the Foundation Phase effectively. The Welsh Government (cited in Waters, J. 2016) have constructed on a 10-year early years workforce development plan which aims to support practitioners' development needs withing the childcare and play provision in both maintained and non-maintained settings in response to workforce recommendations from the Independent Stocktake of the Foundation phase. Early entitlement funding or Better School Funding offers practitioners National Training modules which tracks attendance; however this information is not always accurate or collated correctly which results an inaccurate overview of the amount of training individual practitioners are receiving or identify weather additional training is needed (Estyn, 2010).

This leads to the funding inconsistency, many settings will continue to teach and learn with practitioners who hold a qualified teacher status, or also known as 'QTS', these practitioners often work within settings who lack in funding and structural support (Sylva *et al*, 2010) (cited in Waters, J. 2016). Funding is seen to be a crucial aspect across the country, the guidance on accessing the funding available needs to be made clear and equitable across the country (Welsh Government, 2013). However, According to The Welsh Government (2013) a significant amount of funding has been provided to all local authority settings to meet the costs of additional staff to cover practitioners to attend training. Additionally, the Welsh Assembly Government (cited in Estyn, 2010) is said to have allocated additional funding to authorities in support of Foundation Phase Training and Support Officer to support the training. WISERD (2015) evaluation report shows that there has been funding issues across maintained and non-maintained settings, the report reads that there is increased concern within settings with headteachers being concerned for the implementation of Foundation Phase. Additionally, practitioners have addressed their concern of schools not being

physically ready for the Foundation Phase, especially outdoor spaces, and resources, while there was also concern over the adult to child ratios not being met due to the lack of funding to meet the recommended ratios (WISERD, 2015).

Section 2

It is said by Department of Education (no date) that the purpose of assessing children within the Foundation Phase enables the teacher to track the progression of each child and to determine where they are on the learning continuum which then assists the teacher to plan and support the individual child to progress further and to identify any difficulties or exceptional ability. In addition, The Welsh Government (2017) state that observations are used as a tool to identify where children are developmentally on the learning continuum, observations can identify any difficulties or exceptional ability. According to Welsh Government (2015) observation plays a key role in everyday practise. Similarly, Montessori Guide (2021) argue that observations play a vital role in everyday practise. The Welsh Government (2019) state that children within the Foundation Phase are assessed by their teacher and/or practitioner, a baseline assessment is typically carried out within the first 6 weeks of the child starting reception class, usually age 5, and the end of Foundation Phase which is year 2, usually aged 7. Teachers or practitioners are required to make a statutory baseline for each child against the four Areas of Learning. The Foundation Phase Profile is said to be beneficial to track the child's development throughout their time in the Foundation Phase (Welsh Government, 2015). The Welsh Government (2017) state that The Foundation Phase Profile has been designed to be suitable for all children and support the identification of special educational needs or additional learning needs, however, it is not the purpose of The Foundation Phase Profile to fully assess special educational needs (SEN) or additional learning needs (ALN) children. Through listening to children during a range of activities, indoor and outdoor, observations can take place and the practitioner is successfully able to gather information within different environments. The Welsh Assembly Government (2004) state that all practitioners within an Early Years Education setting should be involved in the development of the setting's SEN policy and procedures for identifying and assessing pupils while also planning and making provision. It is usually the school's decision to decide on the procedures that should be adopted for meeting the needs of all children, for observing and assessing their progress as well as making the provision, it is important that these procedures are carefully monitored and managed and effective communication between all staff. In addition, Children First (2015) argue that assessments and observations are to be carried out spontaneously and during set tasks in a range of environments. However, Davies and Hamilton (2016) believe that assessing children in the outdoors is not used to its full potential due to the lack of resources, level of staff, adverse weather conditions. Fawcett and Watson (2016) suggest that observations an assessment would be much more effective if the adult allowed the child to play and explore freely. McInnes et al, (2013) study showed that children's learning has significantly developed through the power of play. Davies and Hamilton (2016) argue that assessments conducted in the outdoors is clearly valued by practitioners, with the use of the outdoors considered fundamental to the holistic

development of children. Practitioners suggest that assessing children outdoors leads to a more in-depth and knowledge assessment as further 'gaps' could be identified. During research conducted by Davies and Hamilton (2016) findings showed that there was increasing concern amongst practitioners which involved increasing pressure to formally test children's literacy and numeracy. In addition Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2014) and Donaldson (2015) in Wales, the introduction to the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) is causing increasing concern for practitioners through the Foundation Phase to formally assess children, such pressure may impact assessing and observing children. During a study Lee-Hammond and Waller (2014) (cited in Davies and Hamilton 2016) found that teaching staff typically undertook summative assessments, while teaching assistant were more involved with the formative assessments which took place in the outdoors. Natural learning environments is said to be influenced by early years curriculum and pedagogy from Scandinavian countries such as, Finland, Norway, and Denmark. It is argued by Rasku-Puttonen (2010) (cited in Davies and Hamilton 2016) that Finland success in the Programme for International Student Assessment can be attributed to the importance placed on the outdoor learning environment and the way Finnish practitioners develop positive relationships and experiences with the children. According to Pacey (2016) there are different methods to observing a child which include – Written snap shots, movement, and time records, sociograms, written observations and photograph or video recordings, but the most commonly used assessment and observation used within settings are written and photographs. Early Years Careers (2016a) suggest then when observing and assessing the children's development it is important for the practitioner to find a balance between interacting with the child and completing paperwork, interacting will allow further insight to the child's development and understanding. Early Years Careers (2016b) argues that all children should be given the opportunity to attend an education that enables them to achieve the best possible educational outcomes. Early Years Careers (2015) suggest the importance of effective assessments system not only to track the child's progression but to highlight necessary changes to be made to the environment to meet all children's needs. Following the Assess, Plan, Do and Review approach it is imperative that as soon as the practitioner identifies any concerns within the children's progression the parents must be notified, while it will be the settings responsibility to adopt an enabling environment (Early Years Careers, 2016). According to Bellman et al, (2013) developmental assessment is the process of mapping a child's performance with other children of a similar age, however, several factors contribute to a performance varying greatly between children. Bellman et al, (2013) argues that there are many contributing factors as to why children may not meet the developmental 'norm' which vary from environmental factors to genetic factors. Positive experiences during childhood often enhance the child's brain development in the area of linguistic and social skills. A study on abandoned Romanian children provide good evidence on how adverse environments can have effects on the brain growth and development. Globally 1-3% of children are affected by developmental delay while 1% of children have an autism spectrum disorder. All children develop at different rates, and it is important for practitioners to distinguish those who are within the 'normal' range from those following a more pathological course, there is good evidence early identification

and early intervention improve the outcomes for children with the developmental impairments. Additionally Early Education (2012) argue that every child is a unique child who develops at their own pace. The Early Years Foundation Stage (2007a) suggest that effective practise within settings include encouraging children to be able to recognise their own unique qualities, providing equal opportunities and having a clear anti-discrimination policy, ensure that the child and their family feel safe and valued at the setting and supporting the child in day-to-day activities and social skills. The Early Years Foundation Stage (2007b) emphasis on the important to identify any additional needs the learner may have as early as possible as by doing this ensures the child get the correct help. Moving forward, Donaldson (2015) 'Successful Futures' proposed a new curriculum and assessment, within Donaldsons proposal he recommended a change from the current system, the new system is said to help practitioners decide if the child is on track with their learning progression. The aim of the new system is to help practitioner gain a full and clear understanding of the child's learning achievements, by doing this the practitioner will be able to identify and seek support if needed, plan accordingly and report back to the parents effectively. Neaum (2016) explains how assessments of children's learning can be done through careful analysis and interpretation of the documented evidence. This approach is used in Reggio Emilia schools and is said to be highly influential. Estyn (2010) explain how recent research shows majority of local authorities feel all though there is advice, support and training for practitioners which is improving confidence and understanding, there is still room for improvement in assessment areas.

Section 3

What evidence is there to support the importance of outdoor play for young children's Development? How is Forest School Beneficial to young children's development?

There is significant evidence to support outdoor education in early years. The Forest School Association (no date) defines forest school as a child centred, experiential, and inspirational approach to learning which offers opportunities for holistic growth, forest school is a programme which supports, play, exploration and risk taking which offers hand on real experiences in natural settings. Constable, (2014 p.1) explains that Forest School is a familiar phrase used in early years settings across the United Kingdom, Constable, (2014 p.1) also states that the underlying principles of forest schools include inspiring children, to introduce them to new opportunities and experiences, to provide an experience which allows children to explore freely and independently – this is supported by The Welsh Government Play Policy (2020) which signifies the importance of play within the Early Years, the policy guidance defines play as a fundamental part of a child's development. The policy suggests that play should be freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. Forest School Wales (2021b) explain that Forest School provides opportunities for individuals of all

ages and backgrounds to grow in confidence, self-esteem, and independence in special woodland settings, where they are supported in their development by qualified forest school practitioners. In addition, Forest School Wales (2021a) meets a variety of Government Objectives for “Healthy Living”, “Every Child Matters”, and “Inclusion”. Specifically, Forest School Programmes meet the following Welsh Assembly Government strategies and policies. Researchers at Loughborough University (2021) claim that studies reveal how forest schools can be beneficial to children’s development, forest schools are a growing phenomenon within the UK, but what impact does allowing children out of the classroom have on their overall development? Forest Schools originated in Scandinavia where schools use the local woodlands to carry out activities to promote children’s problem solving and co-operation skills as well as confidence and self-esteem. A forest school is a form of outdoor education where children are taken out of their regular classroom and embedded within a woodland environment surrounded by tree’s and partake in several activities. Dr Janine Coates of the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences and Dr Helena Pimlott-Wilson of the Department of Geography (2017) conducted research on how young people learn in different environments, aged between 4 and 5 and 8 and 9 years old. Their research shown the beneficial impact on children’s learning skills outdoors. Anders Szczepanski (2021) a Swedish outdoor learning expert suggests that being outside in the real world is where humans learn best, as the outdoors is where we make use of all senses by seeing, listening, feeling, smelling, and tasting while the outdoors also fosters curiosity, creativity, emotions as well as our natural and cultural history. Similarly, Early Years Careers (2021) explain how forestry schools engage more in challenge, risk play and adventure such as fire building and tree climbing, by doing this add a sense of excitement for the children who are free to explore the environment around them using their senses. In addition, several researchers such as Wells and Lekies (2006), Thompson et al, (2008) have explored the benefits and importance of outdoor learning and experiences for children to support academic achievements and positive outcomes for later development. Furthermore Munoz (2009) reported that forest schools and outdoor activities encourages physical activity, healthy development, and overall well-being of children. Allowing children to play out in the nature seems to make perfect sense when you consider the many scientific benefits, previous studies have found that children who are enrolled at forest schools are less likely to come down with common infections, since they spend little time inside, where viruses and bacteria thrive explains Grahn (1997). Fjortoft (2014) and Martensson (2004) states that children tend to have better motor skills such as balance and coordination engage in more imaginative form of play, while also seeing improvements in confidence, social skills, language and communication, motivation, and concentration. Dr Frances Harris (2016) a senior lecturer in environmental management suggests that the outdoor learning environment promotes problem solving and critical thinking skills, Dr. Frances Harris (2016) believes that this form of learning helps children to respond to challenges, overcome fears and work with others, all of which are skills that are transferable to a classroom and will help become successful in adult life. Sobel et al, (1993 p.250) state that experience of outdoor activities can prove to be a vital part of a child’s development. Research in America has found that children who play in natural environments undertake more creative,

diverse and imaginative play, which is seen as an important element in children's development. Community Playthings (2021) point out that outdoor play enables children to enjoy the natural environment, making use of the open space outdoors allows children to fulfil basic childhood needs such as gross-motor skills this is supported by Greenman (1993). Rousseau (1758) and Johan Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746) were precursor theorists on outdoor play by introducing and sustaining the original idea according to which nature and the natural environment had a definite and positive role in the education of children. Further Frederick Froebel (1852) strongly emphasized the significance of outdoor play and highlights the importance of the outside world. The forest school approach to learning is embedded firmly within the key progressive education theorists of the past 150 years, theorists such as Steiner, Vygotsky, Montessori, and Dewey all of which spoke about the importance of children having the ability to explore the world while being the centre of their own learning. According to Knight (2013 p.17) forest schools offers the opportunity to supported risk type play within the environment by offering children the opportunity to use tools, build and design fires and dens, all forest school experiences must follow a risk/benefit process which is managed jointly by the practitioner and the learner while all activities are tailored to the learner's developmental stage. Forest Research (2021) claim that forest schools provide a great opportunity for learning, particularly for those who do not thrive in a classroom-based environment. An evaluation of forest school projects was conducted by New Economics Foundation (2003), the research finding shows that there is a link between forest schools and the six specific positive outcomes which include self-confidence, self-esteem, team working, motivation, pride in and the understanding of their surroundings. Forest school training (no date) state that the forest school ethos focuses mainly on an approach to learning that maximises the emotional, social and developmental benefits of education, the ethos of Forest School is based on a fundamental respect for children and young people and for their capacity to instigate, test and maintain curiosity in the world around them. It believes in children's right to play, the right to access the outdoors and in particular a woodland environment. This is supported with article 31 of the UNCRC - Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities. Bishops Down Primary School (2021) explain how forest school is in accordance with the national curriculum with the variety of activities which are planned to build and extend knowledge in literacy, science, mathematics, art, and design technology. Due to the research highlighting the significant benefits of the outdoor environment for developing children's gross-motor skills, cognitive and holistic development I propose an observational study comparing children's gross motor movement during inside and outside play in local early year settings.

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