



The British  
Psychological Society

Scottish Division of  
Educational Psychology

*Position Paper*

# Educational Psychology Assessment in Scotland (2014)



**ASPEP**

The Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists



## Acknowledgements

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The revised *Educational Psychology Assessment in Scotland* (2014) position paper was developed by a Working Group of representatives from the Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists (ASPEP) and the Scottish Division of Educational Psychologists (SDEP) in consultation with Dundee and Strathclyde University postgraduate training courses.

The position paper has also benefitted significantly from extensive consultation and feedback from the membership of the ASPEP and the SDEP.

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## Foreword

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*Educational Psychology Assessment in Scotland* was first launched as a position paper in 2005 by the Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists (ASPEP), the British Psychological Society Scottish Division of Educational Psychology (BPS, SDEP) and the educational psychology training programmes in Scotland. This represented the national view held by the profession at that time regarding practice in educational psychology assessment. Since 2005, there have been a number of important developments in the Scottish educational context. These include significant legislative and policy advances and also developments in professional knowledge through the impact of research and theory development.

Additionally, responsibility for professional registration has been assumed by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), and a national round of service inspections completed by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in 2006–2010 was followed by publication of the national ASPECT report, *Educational Psychology in Scotland: Making a Difference* (2011). Professional practice has responded to these developments and recommendations, and it is now timely that the profession review and revise the original guidance on educational psychology assessment.

This revised *Educational Psychology Assessment in Scotland (2014)* paper is designed to support educational psychologists to maintain the highest standards of professional practice in assessment and to provide transparency and accountability for families and other partner agencies with whom educational psychologists work.

## National and legislative context

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National drivers which merit particular emphasis for the profession include:

- Additional Support for Learning legislation (2004 & 2009) and the associated yearly reports on implementation;
- developments across Scotland's children's services and health services relating to *Getting It Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC);
- Curriculum for Excellence developments;
- forthcoming children and young people's legislation; and
- Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000.

These changes set the context within which educational psychologists operate in local authorities. There is a strong emphasis upon assessment as an ongoing and collaborative process linked to a cycle of planning, intervention and review. The principles of the national practice model for GIRFEC provide explicit structures and frameworks for multi-agency work which provide the context within which educational psychologists practice.

The profession functions within local authorities, often as part of a staged intervention process, to ensure that the needs of all children and young people are being met. The educational psychologist provides specialist advice across the range of educational contexts, from casework advice to whole school analysis and to policy and strategic development, in

order to ensure effective inclusion, communication with parents/carers and effective teaching and learning. In doing so, the profession has a unique contribution to the assessment of children and young people’s needs and this is reflected in the statutory requirement for local authorities to provide a psychological service (Education (Scotland) Act, 1980 and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004).

## Features of educational psychology assessment

Psychological assessment in education is a continuous process in which educational psychologists work directly with service users, managers, policy development and research specialists. This provides processes and structures for effective and inclusive education to help all children and young people in Scotland. This is exemplified by the GIRFEC My World Triangle (see Figure 1).

The profession’s emphasis is on reaching solutions to overcome barriers to learning. It involves considering information beyond the level of the individual including the impact of effects of events and circumstances in the surrounding environment and the development of the necessary interventions, supports, procedures and strategic planning required in order to provide effective learning environments across any local authority.

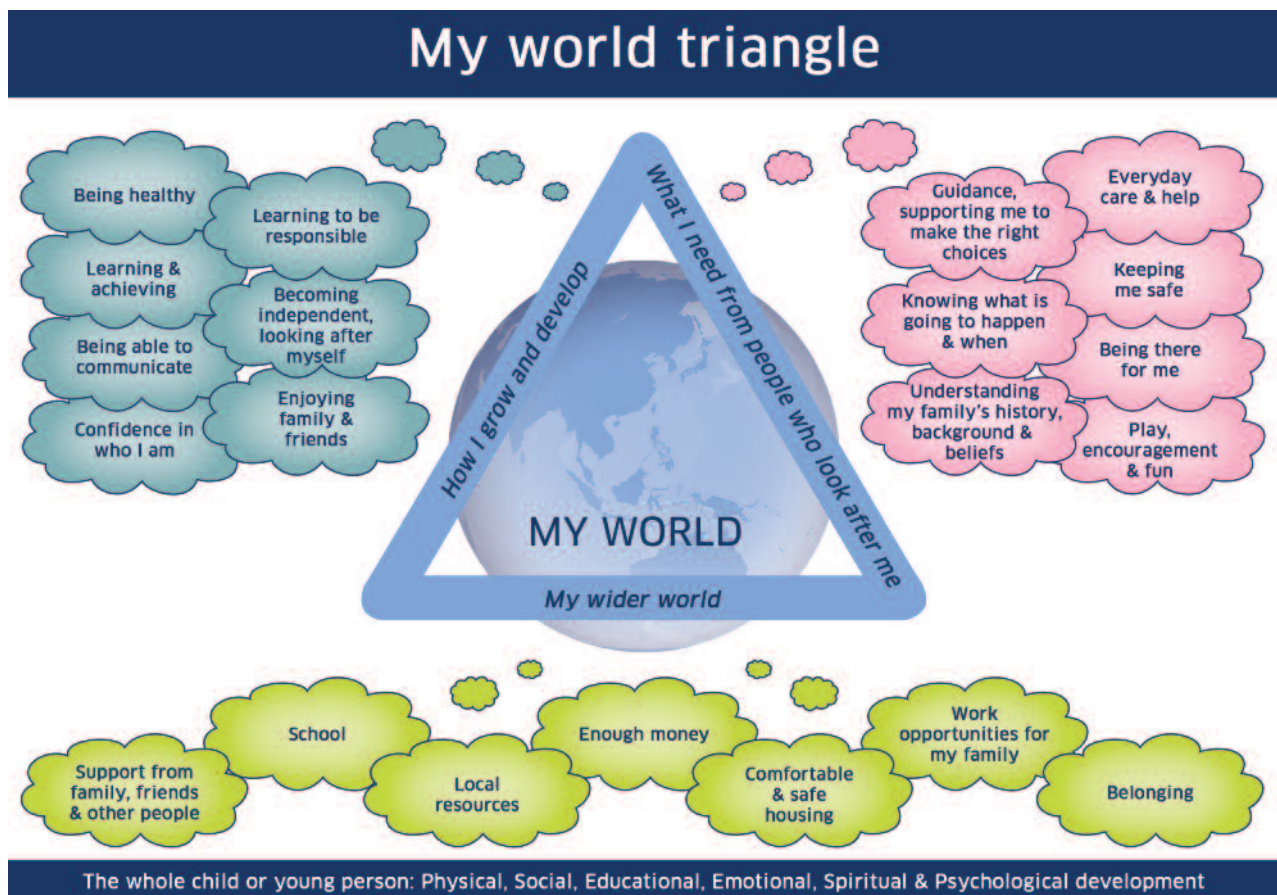


Figure 1: My World Triangle (Crown Copyright; reproduced with permission of Scottish Government GIRFEC team)

Throughout the process of educational psychology assessment, educational psychologists work with children, parents/carers, partners and strategic managers to ensure that children are safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included.

Features of the work of an educational psychologist include:

- Working collaboratively with people who know the young person in order to gather good quality information, about the child or young person, in context including strengths and capabilities.
- Highlighting the importance of the interactive nature of assessment, learning and teaching.
- Working with others to analyse the information gathered to inform the design and implementation of interventions, which reduce barriers to learning and lead to the successful inclusion of the child or young person in their class, school and community.
- Working with local authority managers to develop and evaluate the most effective delivery of teaching and learning methods, in order to achieve the most inclusive environment, for all children and young people.

The educational psychologist usually joins the assessment process after people directly involved with the child or young person have already gathered information and implemented a cycle of intervention and review. An educational psychologist's contribution to the assessment process will often be agreed within a consultation process and may be based on direct or indirect involvement with the child, or a combination of both.

Assessment information may be gathered through consultation with a teacher, parent, carer or other professional, or through a teacher using an agreed investigative framework. In order to supplement this, where necessary, it may also involve approaches including classroom observation, analysis of work, questionnaires, curriculum-based assessment, dynamic assessment, and measures of social-emotional factors, using recognised assessment materials as appropriate. The approaches used will depend on the questions to be answered and on the context within which the difficulties arise.

In keeping with the Additional Support for Learning legislation, the views of the parent(s)/carer(s) and child/young person must be sought and taken account of in the assessment process.

This position paper urges caution regarding the use of psychometric testing as a measure of educational progress in an educational context. Various forms of standardised assessment may be used to supplement contextual assessment information but the use and interpretation of standardised assessment alone is not considered to be best practice in an educational context. Triangulation of information from a variety of sources will produce a more robust assessment of needs and interventions.

## Assessment practice principles

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1. There should always be a clear rationale for educational psychology assessment. This should be directed to promoting the wellbeing and improving the teaching and learning of the children or young people concerned. It should build on information already available.
2. Assessment techniques and approaches are based on an understanding of current psychological theories, methodologies, evidence-based practice and research. Psychologists should be clear about the theory and evidence underpinning their practice.
3. Prior to assessment, parent(s)/carer(s) consent for educational psychologist involvement must always be obtained.
4. It is essential that educational psychologists advise about the most appropriate and embedded educational procedures, which will facilitate the views and participation of children and young people, as core features in assessment processes. Parent(s)/carer(s) may also require support and advice to help facilitate their views and participation.
5. Assessment acknowledges that children and young people develop as a result of an interaction between themselves and their environment. The assessment practice is highlighted by the SH indicators (Figure 2) to be:
  - conducted over time and across different contexts;
  - minimally intrusive, whilst achieving the best outcome for the child/young person;
  - inextricably linked to intervention in such a way, that the assessment is formative and provides results that inform any required intervention;
  - built upon and inform the ongoing cycle of assessment, planning, intervention and review. In terms of best practice, be negotiated within a multi-agency, staged intervention framework;
  - collaborative and working in partnership with parent(s)/carer(s), the child or young person, and those who work most closely with the child or young person; and
  - mindful to consider and promote the young person's strengths for learning.

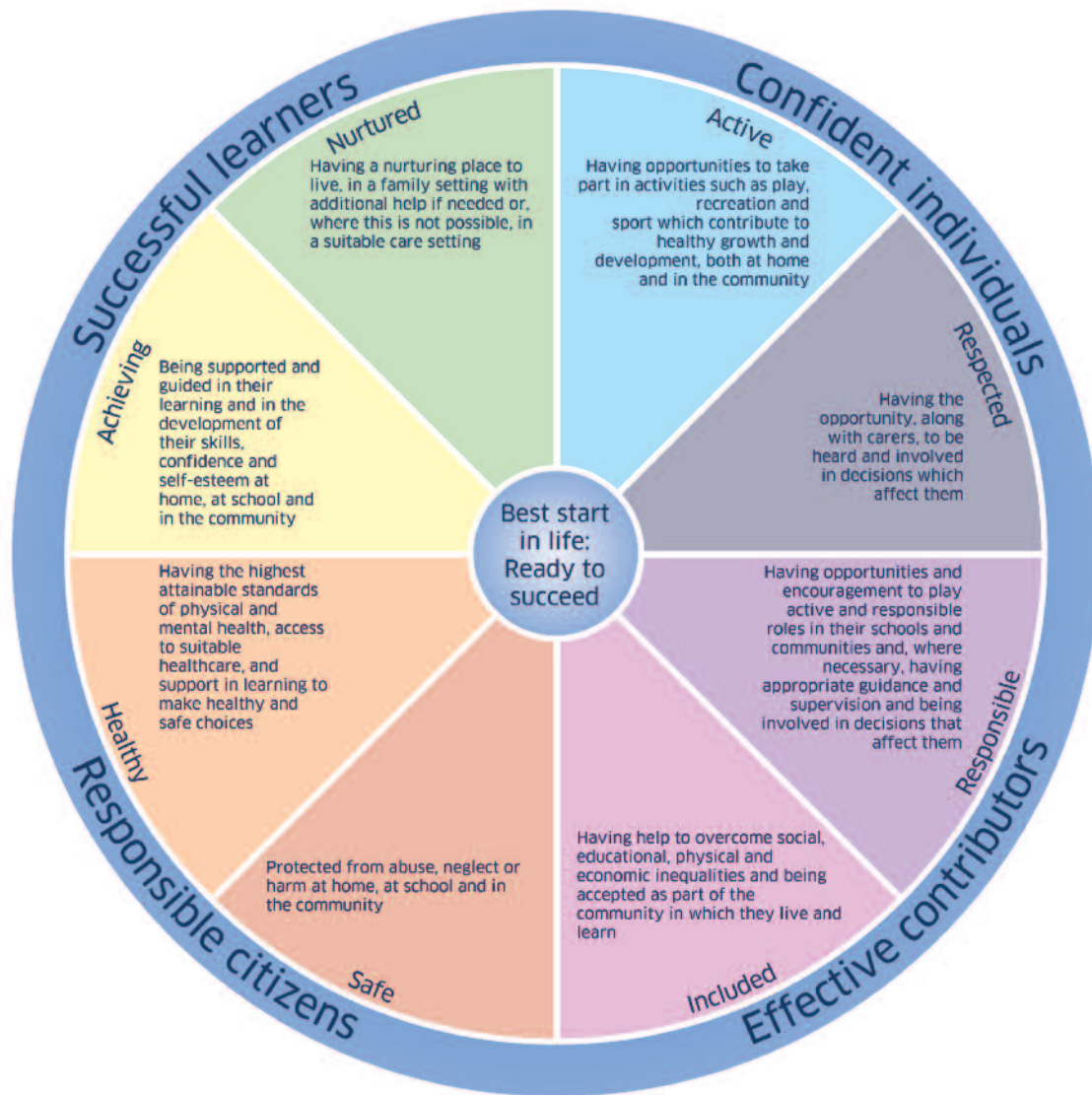


Figure 2: The Wellbeing Wheel, showing the wellbeing indicators.  
(Crown Copyright, used with permission of Scottish Government GIRFEC team).

6. Reporting of assessment outcomes and data should be sensitively and clearly presented and relate to the purpose of the assessment. Reporting will always respect confidentiality and comply with data protection legislation.
7. Educational psychologists have a professional duty to ensure that their contribution to assessment is appropriately informed, by continuing their professional development throughout their career
8. Assessment practice will conform to the British Psychological Society *Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles and Guidelines* (2009) and the Health and Care Professions Council *Standards of Proficiency* (2012).

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