Baseline testing

The importance of baseline testing

Robust baseline assessments, including those used for diagnostic purposes, can provide a useful picture of what a child knows or can do at a certain point in time, as well as gaps in their learning. This information should be used to inform subsequent teaching and learning activities. Without good baseline assessment – a strong starting point – it is impossible to measure progress well: if you don’t know where someone started, knowing whether their end point represents ‘good progress’ or not is not feasible.

Clearly, if teachers are to use baseline assessment to inform their practice, they have to be able to trust the information derived from such testing. This is again where validity and reliability come into play.

Baseline assessments should have a clearly-defined function in a school’s assessment schedule; decisions about actions to be taken in light of the baseline data should be stated before testing, so that the tests selected are appropriate and fit-for-purpose.

There are several baseline assessments commercially available to schools and colleges with students aged 3 – 18. Alternatively, baseline assessments can be created by schools themselves - the focus of the next section.