

What is HLJÓM-2 and what does it assess?

HLJÓM-2 is an age-specific screening tool which is used to assess phonological and linguistic awareness among the oldest group of preschool children. When the screening takes place the children must be at least 4 years, 9 months and 16 days, but no more than 6 years, 1 month and 15 days old. Scores are calculated based on the exact age of the child and reported as skill levels using the terms 'good', 'average', 'poor' or 'very poor'.

The main purpose of HLJÓM-2 is to identify at an early stage those children who suffer from a linguistic development delay, thus allowing an early intervention with the aim of reducing the risk of reading difficulties at a later stage.

By training children's phonological awareness we can lay a solid foundation for reading acquisition and for learning generally, and for this reason it is important to monitor each child's individual progress.

HLJÓM-2 covers the following aspects:

Rhyming – where the child is asked to identify which image out of three shown represents a word that rhymes with a word it hears. Example: *ás – úr – ól*; which picture rhymes with 'hás'? (*ás*).

Syllables – where the child listens to and claps the syllables of each word. Example: *Sæ – mund – ur* (3 syllables).

Compound words – where the child hears two words and is asked to combine them into one. Example: What word can you make by putting together *rúm* and *teppi*? (*rúmteppi*).

Phoneme segmentation – where the child is asked to listen for specific sounds in a word. Example: After pronouncing the child's name slowly and clearly the child is asked whether the sound is heard in the name.

Homonyms – where the child is asked which two pictures out of four shown represent words that are identical or near-identical phonologically. Example: Here are four pictures: *pera* (fruit), *belti*, *pakki* and *[ljósa]pera* (lightbulb); which two pictures use the same word? (*pera*/*[ljósa]pera*).

Word-part deletion – where the child is asked to name the word that remains if the first part of a compound word is removed. Example: What is the word that you get if you remove *rúm* from *rúmteppi*? (*teppi*).

Blending – where the child is asked to combine two or three speech sounds by ear to make a single word. Example: What word is this *ú – r*? (the two sounds being separated by approximately one second when pronounced) (*úr*).

Bilingual children are in the process of acquiring phonological awareness in more than one language and may therefore need a longer time to achieve this than those children who only learn one language.

If a child is assessed as having 'poor' or 'very poor' skills it is necessary to look more closely into the reasons for this and, if their native language is not Icelandic, to ascertain their skill levels in their own language.

Children who are assessed as having 'poor' or 'very poor' skills need to receive additional phonological awareness training, either individually or in a group.

Daily training, at home and in the preschool, helps children to master these aspects of the language.