



Department
for Education

Educational criteria for early years apps

Evaluation of communication, language and literacy apps

July 2019

Summary

This publication is a set of **educational criteria** which has been produced to enable the Department's independent expert panel to assess the quality of early language, literacy and communication apps.

Apps which are submitted for assessment will also be assessed against a set of **technical criteria** in regards to, for example, GDPR and security standards. The technical criteria will be published shortly.

Expiry or review date

This criteria will be reviewed before June 2020

Who is this publication for?

This Criteria is for:

- App Developers
- Local authorities
- Parents
- School leaders, school staff and governing bodies in all maintained schools, academies and free schools

RUBRIC FOR THE EVALUATION OF APPS FOR EARLY COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Pre-requisites:

- The app is aimed at children, although it may contain some features which support adult-led interactions, and/ or parental controls.
- The app supports one or more aspects of communication/ and/or language and/ or literacy, as outlined in the document 'Early Years Outcomes' https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2012/03/Early_Years_Outcomes.pdf
- Educational goals/value of app have a clear and available evidence-base (via articulated evidence from research and/or user testing and/or evaluation of the app).

Educational Content

1	2	3	4
Unsatisfactory Quality	Limited Quality	Good Quality	Excellent Quality
Educational aims/ goals are not clear to parents.	Educational aims/ goals are somewhat clear to parents.	Educational aims/ goals are generally clear to parents.	Educational aims/ goals are consistently clear to parents.
Educational aims/ goals do not align with well-supported evidence on developmentally appropriate and effective practice in the development of young children's communication, language and literacy.	Educational aims/ goals do not always align with well-supported evidence on developmentally appropriate and effective practice in the development of young children's communication, language and literacy.	Educational aims/ goals generally align with well-supported evidence on developmentally appropriate and effective practice in the development of young children's communication, language and literacy.	Educational aims/ goals align with well-supported evidence on developmentally appropriate and effective practice in the development of young children's communication, language and literacy.

1 Unsatisfactory Quality	2 Limited Quality	3 Good Quality	4 Excellent Quality
Inaccurate content (in relation to target skills and/ or knowledge).	Content (in relation to target skills and/ or knowledge) is largely accurate, but may have confusing and/or misleading elements.	Content (in relation to target skills and/ or knowledge) is accurate.	Content (in relation to target skills and/ or knowledge) is accurate.
Content is poorly-structured (sequence does not allow user to build on previous learning steps), which makes achievement of the learning goals a challenge.	Content is not well-structured (sequence does not always allow user to build on previous learning steps), which impedes achievement of the learning goals.	Content is generally well-structured (learning steps sequenced appropriately) to enable achievement of the learning goals	Content is well-structured (learning steps sequenced appropriately) to enable achievement of the learning goals and to extend learning.
Content is not appropriate for the developmental stage/ target age of the child.	Content is not always appropriate for the developmental stage/ target age of the child.	Content is generally appropriate for the developmental stage/ target age of the child.	All content is appropriate for the developmental stage/ target age of the child.
App does not foster play, creativity or productive input.	App offers limited scope to foster play, creativity and productive input.	App offers some scope for play, creativity and productive input, where appropriate.	App fosters play, creativity and productive input, where appropriate.

In-app Support for Learning and Development

<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Unsatisfactory Quality</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Limited Quality</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Good Quality</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Excellent Quality</p>
<p>Lack of different levels of challenge in the app.</p>	<p>App offers one or two levels of challenge, but child may need support to access them.</p>	<p>App offers easy/ medium/ hard levels of challenge, personalised to the child.</p>	<p>Multiple levels of challenge are personalised to the child, with the level of challenge based on previous play.</p>
<p>Limited features of the app that support learning (e.g. text-to-speech/ highlighted words/ images/ prompts).</p>	<p>Limited and/or uneven quality in features of the app that support learning (e.g. text-to-speech/ highlighted words/ images/ prompts).</p>	<p>In the main, the app supports learning effectively through the use of well-designed features (e.g. text-to-speech/ highlighted words/ images/ prompts).</p>	<p>App supports learning effectively through the use of well-designed features (e.g. text-to-speech/ highlighted words/ images/ prompts).</p>
<p>App does not provide timely or appropriate feedback.</p>	<p>Feedback given is uneven in quality/ timing.</p>	<p>In the main, the app provides appropriate and timely feedback.</p>	<p>App consistently provides appropriate and timely feedback, which may be personalised and/ or adaptive.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Unsatisfactory Quality</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Limited Quality</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Good Quality</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Excellent Quality</p>
<p>Hot spots/ interactive features/ music and sounds etc. detract from learning.</p>	<p>Hot spots/ interactive features music and sounds etc. sometimes detract from learning.</p>	<p>Hot spots/ interactive features/ music and sounds etc. generally support learning.</p>	<p>Hot spots/ interactive features/music and sounds etc. consistently support learning.</p>
<p>Child cannot use the app independently, when independent use may be preferable.</p>	<p>Child needs support much of the time to use the app, when independent use may be preferable.</p>	<p>Where appropriate, navigation is in the main easy for the child and promotes independent use.</p>	<p>Where appropriate, easy navigation for the child promotes independent use.</p>
<p>Game mechanics within the app are not based on pedagogically proven approaches.</p>	<p>Some of the game mechanics within the app are based on pedagogically proven approaches.</p>	<p>Game mechanics within the app are generally based on pedagogically proven approaches.</p>	<p>Game mechanics within the app are consistently based on pedagogically proven approaches.</p>

Interaction

1 Unsatisfactory Quality	2 Limited Quality	3 Good Quality	4 Excellent Quality
App does not facilitate meaningful interaction or collaboration with others (carers, other children, virtual characters) where appropriate*, in order to facilitate learning and development.	App facilitates limited interaction or collaboration with others (carers, other children, virtual characters) where appropriate, in order to facilitate learning and development.	Some aspects of the app facilitate meaningful interaction or collaboration with others (parents, carers, others children, virtual characters) where appropriate, in order to facilitate learning and development.	App provides explicit encouragement for and/or facilitates meaningful interaction or collaboration with others (parents, carers, other children, virtual characters) where appropriate, in order to facilitate learning and development.
No feedback/ guidance offered to the adult or older children to enhance scaffolding of learning where this would be appropriate.	Some feedback/ guidance offered to the adult or older children to enhance scaffolding of learning where appropriate.	Feedback/ guidance is offered to the adult or older children to enhance scaffolding of learning where appropriate.	Where appropriate, accessible feedback/ guidance is offered to the adult or older children to enhance scaffolding of learning, which aligns with the relevant evidence.

* **Where appropriate**: When assessing the extent to which apps should explicitly facilitate meaningful interaction and provide feedback/guidance for parents or older siblings, assessors should be guided by evidence on the social nature of oral language learning in particular. Assessors should consider the aspects of communication, language and literacy development addressed by the app, and the extent to which these are likely to be supported through independent use or would be most effectively supported through meaningful interaction with a co-user (i.e. adult or older sibling). Where an app targeting oral language development facilitates meaningful co-use but does not provide explicit in-app feedback/guidance for adults, inclusion on the framework may be enabled through accompanying Department for Education guidance on co-use use of apps with children.

Engagement

1 Unsatisfactory Quality	2 Limited Quality	3 Good Quality	4 Excellent Quality
App is very limited in terms of the features that promote fun, enjoyment, exciting interactions and original ideas.	App is limited in terms of the features that promote fun, enjoyment, exciting interactions and original ideas.	App offers some features that promote fun, enjoyment, exciting interactions and original ideas.	App offers a range of features that promote fun, enjoyment, exciting interactions and original ideas.
App fosters only extrinsic motivation.	App largely fosters extrinsic motivation.	App fosters both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, but with more focus on extrinsic motivation.	App fosters both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation where appropriate.
App offers a narrow range of activity types, when more variety might be appropriate.	App offers a limited range of activity types, when more variety might be appropriate.	App has a dynamic style and offers some variety in activity types, where appropriate.	App has a dynamic style and offers a variety of activity types, where appropriate.
App unlikely to engage the child.	App unlikely to sustain engagement beyond the child's initial encounter with it.	App likely to engage the child.	App likely to support deep engagement.

1	2	3	4
Unsatisfactory Quality	Limited Quality	Good Quality	Excellent Quality
App does not enable personalisation to deepen engagement.	App enables limited personalisation to deepen engagement.	App enables some personalisation to deepen engagement.	App enables personalisation to deepen engagement.

Design/ Functionality

1	2	3	4
Unsatisfactory Quality	Limited Quality	Good Quality	Excellent Quality
No menu or app guide.	Limited menu or app guide.	Good menu or app guide.	Very clear menu or app guide.
Poorly-designed app (layout, use of images, text, hypertext, colour, sound, icons, video, animation, online connection etc.), inappropriate for the target audience.	Design of app (layout, use of images, text, hypertext, colour, sound, icons, video, animation, online connection etc.), is unevenly appropriate for the target audience.	Generally well-designed app (layout, use of images, text, hypertext, colour, sound, icons, video, animation, online connection etc.), appropriate for the target audience.	Very well-designed app (layout, use of images, text, hypertext, colour, sound, icons, video, animation, online connection etc.), appropriate for the target audience.

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<p>App contains gender, ethnic/ racial, disability and/ or other types of stereotypes.</p>	<p>App does not contain gender, ethnic/ racial, disability and/ or other types of stereotypes.</p>	<p>App does not contain gender, ethnic/ racial, disability and/ or other types of stereotypes.</p>	<p>App does not contain gender, ethnic/ racial, disability and/ or other types of stereotypes.</p>
<p>App presents no diversity of characters.</p>	<p>App presents limited diversity of characters.</p>	<p>App presents some diversity in relation to characters.</p>	<p>App presents a diversity of characters.</p>
<p>App disadvantages/ discourages participation from groups or individuals from specific cultural or socio-economic background/s.</p>	<p>App has the potential to disadvantage / discourage participation from groups or individuals from specific cultural or socio-economic background/s.</p>	<p>App does not unfairly disadvantage / discourage participation from groups or individuals from any cultural or socio-economic background.</p>	<p>App does not unfairly disadvantage / discourage participation from groups or individuals from any cultural or socio-economic background.</p>
<p>App does not enable the adult to adjust the settings (e.g. levels; music on/off; subtitles on/off; web connection on/off).</p>	<p>App enables adult to adjust a limited number of settings (e.g. levels; music on/off; subtitles on/off; web connection on/off).</p>	<p>App enables adult to adjust some of the settings (e.g. levels; music on/off; subtitles on/off; web connection on/off).</p>	<p>App enables adult to adjust the settings (e.g. levels; music on/off; subtitles on/off; web connection on/off).</p>
<p>App supports a very limited range of learning needs and there is no evidence the design has been informed</p>	<p>App supports a limited range of learning needs, with little evidence that the design has been informed by the principles of universal design for learning.</p>	<p>App supports a range of learning needs, informed by the principles of universal design for learning.</p>	<p>App supports a wide range of learning needs, informed by the principles of universal design for learning.</p>

1 Unsatisfactory Quality	2 Limited Quality	3 Good Quality	4 Excellent Quality
by principles of universal design for learning [†] .			

[†] The principles of universal design for learning (UDL) are: Equitable use; Flexibility in use; Simple and intuitive; Perceptible information; Tolerance for error; Low physical effort; Size and space for approach and use.



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