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Department
for Education

Guidance

Early years qualifications achieved in England

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Background

This guidance covers qualifications gained in England, you should consult the [Early years qualifications achieved outside England](#) guidance for qualifications gained in:

- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland
- Europe
- Rest of the world

Early years providers can use these early years qualifications lists to:

- check if an individual's qualification meets the approved ['full and relevant' criteria for early years](#)

[qualifications](#)

- check if an individual's qualification meets the [level 3 early years educator criteria](#)
- check if an individual's qualification meets the [level 2 early years practitioner criteria](#)
- confirm if an individual counts in the staff:child ratios set out in the [early years foundation stage framework](#)

Qualifications started before 1 September 2014

Staff who completed or registered for a qualification before 1 September 2014 must hold a qualification that meets the [full and relevant criteria for early years qualifications](#) in order to count towards the level 2 or level 3 early years foundation stage (EYFS) staff:child ratios. Candidates who achieved level 3 qualifications before Sept 2014 do not need to hold level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications.

Search our complete list of [all approved pre-September 2014 early years qualifications](#).

The qualification is not approved for working in the staff:child ratios if it:

- is not listed
- is listed but is not full and relevant
- does not match exactly the title on the spreadsheet

You need to consult the spreadsheet to find out which level 3 and level 2 early years qualifications are approved for working in staff:child ratios after 1 September 2014. These can be used if anyone wants to undertake a DfE approved early years qualification.

Qualifications started after 1 September 2014

Changes to NCFE CACHE and Pearson early years educator (EYE) and early years practitioner (EYP) qualification certificates

When employing a member of staff, you will need to check NCFE CACHE and Pearson qualification certificates to establish:

- whether the learner has achieved a 'knowledge only pathway' early years educator (EYE) or early years practitioner (EYP) qualification
- if the qualification has not met the EYE criteria

This will be clearly displayed on the certificate.

Where the achievement of the qualification is 'knowledge only pathway' or does not state the EYE status, the holder cannot be counted in the staffing ratios. The 'knowledge only pathway' EYE or EYP qualification allows the learner to progress to further education or higher education.

You can:

- get more information on the [NCFE CACHE website](#)
- see which qualifications are affected using the qualifications spreadsheet

Level 2

From 1 September 2014 until 31 August 2019, all level 2 early years qualifications are full and relevant if they are:

- early years (0 to 5 years) related and appropriate to early years practice
- Ofqual-approved and included on their [list of regulated qualifications](#)

Appropriate to early years practice means that the qualification needs to be relevant to working in an early years setting that covers childcare and child development for the 0 to 5 age range. A level 2 qualification in babysitting, for example, would not be appropriate to early years practice.

From 1 September 2019, all level 2 qualifications must meet the [level 2 early years practitioner criteria](#). Awarding organisations have developed these qualifications and they have been available from 1 September 2019.

Search our list of [approved early years qualifications that meet the level 2 early years practitioner criteria](#). We will update this list when new qualifications are added.

Level 3

From 1 September 2014, all level 3 qualifications must meet the [early years educator criteria](#). This means that all staff who have registered for a qualification since that date can be counted in the EYFS staff:child ratios at level 3 if they hold:

- a level 3 early years educator qualification
- suitable level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications

Search our full list of [early years qualifications that meet the early years educator criteria](#).

If a person holds a level 3 early years qualification but does not have suitable level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications, you can only count them at level 2 in the EYFS staff:child ratios.

If a person holds a level 3, 4, 5, 6 or 7 that is not on our list of approved early years educator qualifications, they may be able to count in the EYFS staff:child ratios at level 2 providing that:

- the qualification was taken between 1 September 2014 and 31 August 2019
- the qualification is 0 to 5 years related
- the qualification is appropriate to early years practice

Appropriate to early years practice means that the qualification covers childcare and child development for the 0 to 5 age range.

From 1 September 2019, level 3 (or above) qualifications started on or after this date cannot be counted in

the level 2 staff:child ratios as shown above. From 1 September 2019 those qualification not listed as full and relevant for level 3, regardless of level, cannot be counted in the level 2 staff:child ratio. This is due to the [level 2 early years practitioner criteria](#).

These are the minimum qualification requirements that we expect staff to have if they want to work in an early years setting. However, employers can set their own higher qualification requirements when recruiting staff if they wish. Employers would need to ensure that higher level qualifications are either on the DfE approved list or that the employee also holds a DfE approved level 3 qualification.

We also do not set entry requirements for early years training courses. Training providers set their own entry requirements for entry to courses.

Level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications

Holders of level 3 qualifications started after 1 September 2014 will also need to hold a suitable level 2 qualification in literacy and numeracy.

Staff who have registered for a qualification since 1 September 2014 that meets the full and relevant criteria must also have suitable level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications to count towards the EYFS staff:child ratios at level 3.

These are:

English

- functional skills qualification in English at level 2
- GCSE/International GCSE qualification in English language and/or literature to at least grade C (grade 4)
- key skills qualification in communication at level 2
- A level or AS level qualification in English language and/or English literature to at least grade E
- O level qualification in English to at least grade C
- CSE grade 1 English (language)
- Basic skills certificate L2 - certificate in adult literacy
- British Sign Language (BSL) for people who use BSL as their primary language

Also recognised: Scottish, Northern Irish and Welsh equivalents.

Maths

- functional skills qualification in maths at level 2
- GCSE/International GCSE qualification in maths to at least grade C (grade 4)
- key skills qualification in application of number at level 2
- A level or AS level qualification in maths or pure maths and/or further maths to at least grade E
- O level qualification in maths to at least grade C
- CSE grade 1 maths
- Basic skills certificate L2 - certificate in adult numeracy

Also recognised: Scottish, Northern Irish and Welsh equivalents.

Special educational needs and disability (SEND)

All early years providers are required to have arrangements in place to:

- identify and support children with special educational needs or disabilities
- promote equality of opportunity for children in their care

These requirements are set out in the [EYFS framework](#).

DfE has worked with organisations specialising in SEND to create a level 3 early years special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) [qualification specification](#) and [role description](#) for those working in non-maintained early years settings.

The documents, developed by the group, are intended as guidance for early years providers and practitioners to help to clarify the role of the early years SENCO. They should be read alongside the [special educational needs and disability code of practice](#).

The SENCO qualification specification and job description are available on the following websites:

- [Foundation years](#)
- [SEND gateway - EY SENCO level 3 qualification specification](#)
- [SEND gateway - job description](#)

Awarding organisations will use the qualification specification to develop qualifications for anyone wanting to specialise at level 3 as an early years SENCO. However, it is not mandatory for an individual in non-maintained settings to hold a level 3 early years SENCO qualification.

SENCOs in local authority maintained schools are required to have qualified teacher status (QTS) and to gain the [Master's-level National Award for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator](#) within 3 years of taking up the post.

We have developed a level 2 early years SEND qualification specification, which provides continuing professional development (CPD) for level 2 practitioners who achieved a qualification before the introduction of the [new level 2 early years practitioner criteria](#).

The level 2 SEND specification is intended as guidance for early years providers and level 2 practitioners who wish to develop knowledge and skills of working with babies and children with SEND. It also provides guidance for awarding organisations and training providers to develop qualifications or training courses.

The level 2 SEND specification can be found on the following websites:

- [SEND gateway - level 2 SEND specification](#)
- [Foundation years - level 2 SEND specification](#)

Free SEND resources

The National Association of Special Educational Needs (NASEN) was funded by DfE to produce free [SEND resources specific to early years](#), including:

- webcasts

- miniguides
- training materials

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