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Department  
for Education

Guidance

# Early years educator level 3: qualifications criteria (from 1 September 2024)

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## Context

It is the role of the Department for Education (DfE) to define the content of the level 3 qualifications that practitioners must hold to be included in the ratios specified in the [early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#).

DfE does this by defining criteria that qualifications must meet to enable practitioners to demonstrate their competence.

The criteria lay out the minimum skill and knowledge requirements for level 3 early years educators to deliver the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework effectively. It is not a detailed course curriculum, nor a list of activities that every individual must experience during their training.

Training providers are best placed to design their curricula and identify placement opportunities to ensure future level 3 early years educators learn the minimum skill and knowledge requirements set out in this criteria.

# Early years foundation stage statutory framework

The early years foundation stage sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children a broad range of knowledge and skills that provide a foundation for good future progress through school and life.

## Qualification criteria

The qualification criteria lay out the minimum requirements for what an early years educator should know, understand and be able to do to be considered qualified to support young children from birth to age 5 in the early years foundation stage. It is divided into 2 sections:

- section i: Summary of qualification content and assessment criteria
- section ii: Minimum qualification content requirements for a level 3 early years educator

The term 'children' is used as an all-encompassing term to include babies, toddlers and young children from birth to age 5.

## Section i: Summary of qualifications content and assessment criteria for level 3 early years educator

### Qualification content

1. Plan and provide effective early years education that enables children to progress and prepares them for school
  - A: Child development: what to expect and when
  - B: Curriculum: what we want children to learn
  - C: Pedagogy: helping children to learn
  - D: Assessment: checking children's learning and development
2. Supporting children with special educational needs and disability (SEND)
3. Safeguarding
4. Health, wellbeing and safety
5. Work in partnership with the key person, colleagues, parents, carers or other professionals and agencies
6. Own role, practice and development

### Accreditation

All level 3 early years educator qualifications must meet the national requirements set by Ofqual for valid, reliable assessment and awarding procedures. They must also

be regulated by Ofqual onto the qualifications and credit framework or national qualifications framework.

## **Section ii: Minimum qualification content requirements for a level 3 early years educator**

### **1. Plan and provide effective early years education that enables children to progress and prepares them for school**

#### **A: Child development: what to expect and when**

##### **Educators will learn that:**

1.1 All children and young people are entitled to an appropriate education, one that is appropriate to their needs, promotes high standards and the fulfilment of potential, as set out in the [Equality Act 2010](#).

1.2 An effective early years educator knows the expected patterns of babies' and children's development from birth to 5 years old, and has an understanding of further development from 5 to 7 years.

1.3 An effective early years educator understands babies' and children's development patterns, including:

- cognitive
- speech, language, and communication development
- physical
- emotional
- neurological and brain development

1.4 Self-regulation changes according to a child's age and development. Children are in the early stages of learning to self-regulate and it is something that is developed throughout the early years. Co-regulation (the support we provide to children to help them understand, express and regulate their feelings) is a vital building block towards the ability to self-regulate.

1.5 There is a range of evidence-based theories, philosophical approaches and research that underpin early years development. Some approaches are not evidence-based and do not support childhood development.

1.6 Personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is crucial for babies and children to lead healthy and happy lives and is fundamental to their cognitive development. The important attachments that shape their social world underpin babies' and children's personal development.

1.7 The ways babies' and children's learning and development can be affected by their individual circumstances and significant events in their lives.

1.8 Different cultural backgrounds and family circumstances can impact babies and children's learning and development.

1.9 Physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing are important and can impact on babies' and children's development.

**Educators will learn how to:**

- promote equality of opportunity in the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with SEND
- identify, help and work appropriately with others to provide children and babies with any additional support they may need
- apply evidence-based theories and philosophical approaches in practice, and as appropriate, based on a clear understanding of cognitive science
- support children to develop a positive sense of self and to recognise, understand and manage their emotions, including supporting a child's understanding of differing emotional reactions and what may or may not be appropriate
- use co-regulation to support children when they are experiencing any range of emotions, by providing warm, responsive interactions to help support the development of self-regulation
- support children to form positive attachments, including how to develop warm and responsive relationships with other children, with clearly established and age-appropriate boundaries
- avoid stereotypes - for example, those based on gender, culture, or race, and explain how they can cause damage (how they might encourage prejudice)
- analyse and explain how cultural background and family circumstances can impact on babies' and children's learning and development
- interact with babies and children with confidence to positively impact their health and wellbeing

Prepare and support babies and children through transitions and significant events in their lives, such as:

- moving school
- starting and moving through or between early years settings
- birth of a sibling
- moving home
- family breakdown
- living outside of the home
- loss of significant people or bereavement
- social events that impact their lives, such as COVID-19
- adoption and care; and including the significance of adverse childhood experiences and trauma

Promote health and wellbeing in settings by implementing strategies to encourage babies and children to:

- consume healthy and balanced meals, snacks and drinks appropriate for their age and that support good oral health
- be physically active through planned and spontaneous activity throughout the day, both indoors and outdoors
- be aware of personal safety and the safety of others
- develop personal hygiene practices, including oral hygiene

## **B: Curriculum: what we want children to learn**

**Educators will learn that:**

1.10. The early years foundation stage sets out the early education curriculum requirements from birth to age 5. These are:

- communication and language
- physical development
- personal, social and emotional development
- literacy
- mathematics
- understanding the world
- expressive arts and design

1.11. The content of the curriculum is planned for all children. The carefully planned and sequenced curriculum recognises that some forms of knowledge are important, useful and interesting. These forms of knowledge help prepare children for future learning and are not learned or discovered without explicit teaching.

1.12. Children are likely to have different levels of prior experience and knowledge. The curriculum should take account of this prior knowledge and be planned accordingly. Pedagogical approaches to teaching may need to be adapted because of this.

1.13. Communication and language is the cornerstone of an early years curriculum, which can provide all children with an equal chance of success.

1.14. The impact of an effective communication and language curriculum shows positive benefits for young children's development, including their spoken language skills, their understanding of language, and their early reading skills, including for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

1.15. Some children are at an earlier stage of language development and can experience speech and language difficulties.

1.16. There are ways to communicate with all children, appropriate for their stages of development. This may include those who have speech or language differences, such as some SEND or neurodivergent children, and those for whom English is an additional language (EAL).

#### **Educators will learn how to:**

- plan an educational programme, reflecting the child's:
  - stage of development
  - individual interests, needs and circumstances
  - entitlement to new, important and interesting knowledge.
- use appropriate curriculum and practice support, such as the non-statutory Development Matters guidance.
- choose, plan and sequence what all children need to learn
- develop, support and promote babies' and children's speech, language, and communication through effective planned adult interactions, such as:
  - reading aloud stories and talking about them to build familiarity and understanding
  - exploring vocabulary in wider contexts once children know a story well through conversation and sensitive questioning, using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures
  - supporting awareness of sounds through rhymes and songs
- communicate with all children in ways that will be understood, including verbal and non-verbal communication, to extend their learning and development
- help children to catch-up with language development through planned use of pronunciations, words, and phrases

- identify delays in communication development and describe appropriate support services for babies and children

## **C: Pedagogy: helping children to learn**

### **Educators will learn that:**

1.17. There are different pedagogical approaches and what these are, such as:

- play
- direct teaching
- adult explanations
- adult modelling
- learning from peers
- guided learning

1.18. An effective early years educator makes adaptations to their teaching (adaptive pedagogy): these changes promote learning for all.

1.19. The learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, is a resource that supports the implementation of the curriculum.

### **Educators will learn how to:**

- select and combine the best pedagogical approaches, based on the curriculum and children's prior knowledge, considering an appropriate balance of adult and child-led activities, for example:
  - role modelling and supporting children's group learning and socialisation
  - reading a story with expression and clarity
  - explaining new concepts with clarity and precision
  - using strategies for supporting early literacy and mathematics.
- adapt teaching to suit babies' and children's different starting points, experience and knowledge, ensuring that it goes beyond their existing interests and gives them the best chance of success now and later \*utilise and resource the learning environment to help babies and children progress against the planned curriculum
- respond to the needs and interests of the child, to support intended learning, including:
  - giving encouragement
  - introducing the child to new interests
  - applying strategies to develop and extend children's development, learning and thinking, including sustained shared thinking.
- communicate with all children in ways that will be understood. Adapt teaching approaches as appropriate to ensure children with speech and language difficulties and those with whom English as an additional language (EAL) are supported to catch up

## **D: Assessment: checking children's learning and development**

### **Educators will learn that:**

1.20. Assessment plays an important part in helping parents, carers and practitioners to recognise children's progress, understand their needs, and to plan and provide

activities and support.

1.21. Ongoing assessment (also known as formative assessment) is an integral part of the learning and development process. It involves practitioners knowing what children can and can't do, and then shaping teaching and learning so that children develop the broad range of skills, knowledge and attitudes they need as foundations for future progress.

1.22. An effective early years educator considers when and why to carry out accurate and proportionate assessment. Assessment is about noticing what children can do and what they know. It is not about lots of data and evidence. It should not involve taking lots of time away from teaching and supporting children or have a disproportionate impact on workload.

1.23. There are different assessment methods and techniques, which inform what we know about children's progress and the planning cycle. These should be based on age and stage of babies' and children's development. There are benefits and limitations of assessment.

1.24. The key stages in assessing children's progress, including the progress check at age 2, the reception baseline assessment, the early years foundation stage profile and the value these have for:

- the baby or child
- the parents or carers
- curriculum adaptation
- the early years setting and key stakeholders in planning the next steps

#### **Educators will learn how to:**

- carry out assessment effectively, plan and record the outcomes, and share results accurately and confidentially in line with the early years foundation stage statutory framework and setting's requirements
- discuss children's progress and plan the next stages in their learning with the key person, colleagues, parents or carers
- work with colleagues to identify efficient approaches to assessment
- use information from assessment to adjust curriculum and plans so that any gaps in children's learning are addressed and support the child's development

#### **Relevant guidance for this part of the criteria includes:**

- [Development Matters](#)
- [Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#)
- [Example menus for early years settings in England](#)
- [Physical activity guidelines: UK Chief Medical Officers' report](#)
- [Eat better, start better: foundation years](#)
- [Oral health: help for early years providers](#)
- [Food safety: help for early years providers](#)
- [Food safety advice on choking hazards in settings: foundation years](#)
- [NHS Start for Life: weaning](#)

## **2. Supporting children with special educational needs and disability (SEND)**

**Educators will learn that:**

2.1. All children and young people are entitled to a quality education, one that is appropriate to their needs, promotes high standards and the fulfilment of potential.

2.2. There are 4 general areas of need, and how to balance these against a detailed understanding of an individual baby or child's needs:

- communication and interaction
- cognition and learning
- social, emotional and mental health
- physical and sensory needs

2.3. There are appropriate strategies for supporting a baby or child with SEND.

2.4. A delay in a baby or a child's learning and development does not necessarily indicate a learning difficulty or disability that requires special educational provision. The delay may be due to a gap in a baby or child's knowledge and understanding.

2.5. Difficult or withdrawn behaviour does not necessarily mean that a baby or child has SEND.

2.6. There are specialist aids, resources, and equipment available to support babies and children with SEND.

**Educators will learn how to:**

- explain and apply the early years foundation stage statutory framework and [SEND code of practice](#) in relation to the care and education of babies and children with SEND through a graduated approach
- work effectively in partnership with others, including parents and carers, to promote and implement appropriate strategies for supporting the progress of babies and children with SEND
- promote and encourage a working environment that values and respects the individual developmental needs and stages of babies and children with SEND
- effectively carry out a child's care plan alongside parents and carers, including the initial assessment, implementation, and ongoing review
- use specialist aids, resources and equipment available to support babies and children with SEND

**Relevant guidance for this part of the criteria includes:**

- [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#)
- [Equality Act 2010: guidance](#)

### 3. Safeguarding

**Educators will learn that:**

3.1. Safeguarding and security systems are an important part of keeping babies and children safe.

3.2. An effective early years educator understands their own role and responsibilities, including appropriate supervision of others, in relation to safeguarding and security, including child protection, duty of care, reporting and confidentiality of information.

3.3. An effective early years educator knows about employer, local and national safeguarding policies and procedures as set out in statutory and non-statutory



guidance and the need to stay updated on changes to legislation.

3.4. An effective early years educator knows the signs of harm and the different types of abuse and what these are, including but not limited to:

- neglect
- physical
- emotional
- online
- domestic
- sexual abuse

**Educators will learn how to:**

- recognise when a baby or child is in danger or at risk of abuse, including online, and know how to act to protect them
- carry out own role and act upon responsibilities, including providing appropriate supervision of others in relation to safeguarding and security, including child protection, duty of care, reporting and confidentiality of information
- find and stay updated on employer, local and national safeguarding policies and procedures as set out in statutory and non-statutory guidance
- follow [Ofsted's whistleblowing policy](#) to pass on information that, where it is reasonable to believe, shows wrongdoing or a cover-up by an employer's organisation. This might be about activity that is illegal, risks others' health and safety, is about poor practice or fails to meet statutory requirements

**Relevant guidance for this part of the criteria includes:**

- [Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#)
- [Keeping children safe in education](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children](#)
- [Prevent duty guidance](#)
- [Reporting concerns and whistleblowing about children's social care services](#)

## **4. Health, wellbeing and safety**

**Educators will learn that:**

4.1. There are legal requirements, statutory guidance and other non-statutory guidance on health and safety, security, and confidentiality of information that must be adhered to.

4.2. It is important to know what the signs and symptoms are which may indicate that a child is injured, unwell (including common childhood illnesses and allergies) or in need of urgent medical or dental attention.

4.3. It is important to prevent and control infection.

4.4. There are different stages of weaning and it is important to keep knowledge up-to-date, including knowledge of food allergies and anaphylaxis.

4.5. Mealtimes can be a high-risk environment for babies and young children in regard to choking, the signs of choking, that choking can be completely silent, therefore children should be supervised closely when eating.

4.6. It is important to ensure equipment, furniture, and materials are used safely and

the dangers for not doing so.

4.7. It is important for babies and children to have a healthy, balanced and nutritious diet, to be physically active and to have good oral health.

**Educators will learn how to:**

Identify and act upon own responsibilities in relation to:

- health and safety
- confidentiality of information
- promoting the welfare of babies and children

Carry out risk assessments and risk management in line with:

- employer, local and national requirements
- policies and procedures

Respond and take appropriate action to accidents and emergency situations, including:

- a baby or young child requiring urgent medical or dental attention
- a non-medical incident or emergency
- identifying risks and hazards
- receiving, storing, recording, administering and the safe disposal of medicines

Implement effective strategies for preventing and controlling infection, including:

- handwashing
- food hygiene
- dealing with spillages safely
- safe disposal of waste
- using correct personal protective equipment
- knowledge of common childhood illnesses and immunisation
- exclusion periods for infectious diseases

Maintain accurate and coherent records and reports and share information, when appropriate, to ensure the needs of all children are met. Records and reports include:

- medication requirements
- special dietary needs
- planning
- observation and assessment
- health, safety, and security
- accidents and near misses
- daily registers

Use equipment, furniture, and materials safely, following the manufacturer's instructions and setting's requirements, with regard for sleep safety. Assist others in the safe use of:

- equipment
- furniture
- materials

Share information with parents and carers about:

- the importance of healthy balanced diets

- looking after teeth and oral health
- being physically active

Explain, plan, and carry out respectful care routines appropriate to the development, stage, dignity and needs of the child, including:

- eating (feeding and weaning and complementary feeding)
- nappy-changing procedures
- potty and toilet training
- care of skin, teeth, and hair
- rest and sleep provision

Other dietary considerations including:

- use current dietary guidance for early years and be able to explain why it is important for babies and children to have a healthy, balanced diet and be physically active
- find and apply the most up-to-date advice on weaning provided by the NHS.
- prepare food that is suitable for the age and development of babies and children, referring to the most up-to-date guidance
- supervise children effectively when eating

**Relevant guidance for this part of the criteria includes:**

- [Example menus for early years settings in England](#)
- [Physical activity guidelines: UK Chief Medical Officers' report](#)
- [Eat better, start better: foundation years](#)
- [Oral health: help for early years providers](#)
- [Food safety: help for early years providers](#)
- [Food safety advice on choking hazards in settings: foundation years](#)
- [NHS Start for Life: weaning](#)
- [Health protection in children and young people settings, including education](#)

## **5. Work in partnership with the key person, colleagues, parents, carers or other professionals and agencies**

**Educators will learn that:**

5.1. It is important to develop and maintain good relationships and partnerships in an early years setting to ensure the needs of all children are met.

5.2. Parent and carer engagement is consistently associated with ensuring their child's subsequent academic success.

5.3. Effective engagement with parents and carers is important and that working effectively with parents and carers may be challenging and is likely to require sustained effort and support.

5.4. Setting leaders need to collaborate and work with colleagues and other relevant professionals within and beyond their setting to ensure babies and children progress well in their learning.

5.5. It is important to be an advocate for the child's learning and development, parental and carer engagement, the home learning environment, and their roles in early learning.

5.6. There are other agencies and professionals that work with and support early years settings and children, both statutory and non-statutory, including local authorities and other relevant agencies and bodies. These all have different roles and responsibilities.

5.7. Ofsted is responsible for the regulation and inspection of early years provision. It carries out inspections and reports on the quality and standards of provision.

**Educators will learn how to:**

- work co-operatively and communicate effectively with key persons, colleagues, other professionals, and agencies to meet the needs of babies and children and enable them to progress
- work in partnership with parents and carers to help them recognise and value the significant contributions they make to the child's health, wellbeing, and learning and development
- encourage parents and carers to take an active role in their baby's or child's care, play, and learning and development
- explain the roles and responsibilities of other agencies and professionals that work with and support the setting and children, both statutory and non-statutory, and be familiar with statutory and non-statutory guidance to support this
- make additional provisions to support babies' and children's education and development where they lack this support from parents carers
- work effectively and confidently with Ofsted, including having confidence in using [Ofsted's early years inspection framework](#)

**Relevant guidance for this part of the criteria includes:**

- [Education inspection framework \(EIF\)](#)
- [Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#)
- [Keeping children safe in education](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children](#)
- [Prevent duty guidance](#)

## **6. Own role, practice and development**

**Educators will learn that:**

6.1. There are expected behaviours in a professional and early years setting.

6.2. A level 3 early years educator may be expected to supervise staff or lead a setting.

6.3. Supervision is an opportunity for staff to discuss any issues, identify solutions to address issues as they arise and receive coaching to improve their personal effectiveness. Effective supervision provides support, coaching and training for the practitioner and promotes the interests of babies and children.

6.4. There are procedures that must be adhered to in the work setting and the importance of these for:

- reporting
- whistleblowing
- protecting and promoting the welfare of children
- safeguarding
- confidentiality

- information-sharing
- use of technology
- referring development concerns
- protecting practitioners, for example media and online presence
- staff health and safety, including mental health and wellbeing support

6.5. Engaging in reflective practice and evidence-based, continuous professional development can improve own skills, practice, and subject knowledge, increase career opportunities and help children's academic outcomes, especially in areas of disadvantage.

6.6. Respecting and promoting diversity and inclusion, cultural differences and family circumstances is an important part of the role.

**Educators will learn how to:**

- use and model good communication skills, including a good command of the English language in spoken and written form - for example, when working with children, emails, in meetings and discussions
- foster a culture of mutual support, teamwork and continuous improvement that encourages confidential discussion of sensitive issues, through effective supervision at all stages of a career
- follow procedures in the work setting, including where appropriate updating and developing policies and procedures, for:
  - reporting
  - whistleblowing
  - protecting and promoting the welfare of children
  - safeguarding
  - confidentiality
  - information-sharing
  - use of technology
  - referring development concerns
  - protecting practitioners - for example, media and online presence
  - staff health and safety, including mental health and wellbeing support
- explain own role, responsibilities and expected behaviours, and the roles of colleagues in the setting and team
- seek out feedback from others to identify and support career development goals, for example through mentoring and/or supervised observations
- explain how our own and others' behaviour can impact on babies and children and the importance of role-modelling positive behaviours
- be confident in supporting or challenging the practice of colleagues

**Relevant guidance for this part of the criteria includes:**

- [Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings](#)
- [Education inspection framework \(EIF\)](#)
- [Ofsted inspections: what early years providers and practitioners need to know](#)

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