

Employer guide to Competency-based qualifications in Education and Childcare

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Introduction

NCFE’s qualifications in education and childcare are varied, stretching across the diverse range of teaching and learning within the sector. Qualifications in this field of learning typically involve competency-based evidence requirements – this includes all qualifications that have learning outcomes requiring a demonstrable outcome, often referred to as ‘be able to’ criteria. The significance of such competency-based criteria increases for qualifications that are mandatory requirements for practice, implying a ‘licence to practice’ or ‘full and relevant’ for work in early years settings.

The landscape for education and childcare has shifted enormously in recent years, and the introduction of the Post 16 Education Plan Technical Education Reform has led to further changes.

We understand that as employers, you may often find yourself referring to the [Department for Education’s \(DfE\) qualification checker](#) to look into which qualifications are full and relevant for employment at level 2 and level 3, and how the mandated Early Years Educator criteria introduced in 2014 and Early Years Practitioner (EYP) criteria, (introduced in 2019) impacts the validity of qualifications.

With these changes in mind, we’ve created this spotlight document to support employers in their understanding of early years (EY) qualifications. However, please do continue to refer to the checker linked above if you’re unsure as to whether a qualification is valid. Early years employers use the qualification checker produced by the Department for Education when considering if a qualification is full and relevant at either Level 2 or Level 3.

Licence to practice/full and relevant

Level 3, 4 and 5 qualifications

We have a wide selection of Early Years Educator (EYE) qualifications that are full and relevant which can be found on the [NCFE website](#) and below*:

- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years Workforce \(Early Years Educator\) | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education \(Early Years Educator\) | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Early Years Education and Care \(Early Years Educator\) | NCFE \(withdrawn from study but still full and relevant\)](#)

- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy - Birth to Seven \(Early Years Educator\) | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 4 Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy - Birth to Seven \(Early Years Educator\) | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 5 Diploma for the Early Years Senior Practitioner | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Technical Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education \(Early Years Educator\) | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Technical Level 3 Diploma in Early Years Education and Care \(Early Years Educator\) | NCFE \(withdrawn but still full and relevant\).](#)

The following qualifications are suitable for continuous professional development but are not full and relevant:

- [NCFE CACHE Level 2 Award in An Introduction to Neuroscience in Early Years \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate in Understanding Children and Young People's Mental Health \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate in Understanding Mental Health First Aid and Mental Health Advocacy in the Workplace \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate in Understanding Mental Health in the Early Years \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Award for Special Educational Needs Coordinators in Early Years Settings \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Award for the Early Years Child Development Advocate Programme \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Award in Paediatric First Aid \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 4 Award in Promoting Health and Well-Being Through Physical Activity and Nutrition Co-Ordination in the Early Years \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 4 Award in Special Educational Needs and Disability \(Send\) Leadership and Management in the Early Years \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 4 Certificate for the Advanced Practitioner in Schools and Colleges \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 4 Certificate for the Early Years Advanced Practitioner \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 4 Certificate in Neuroscience in Early Years \(qualhub.co.uk\)](#)

Knowledge-only qualifications – and what this means

It should be noted that during the Covid-19 pandemic, we adapted some of our qualifications to 'knowledge-only' to allow students to complete the knowledge part of the qualification, but not the competency (as many students could not access placements due to the restrictions in place). Therefore, where the qualification certificate shows, for instance, "NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Early Years Education and Care (knowledge-only pathway)", the qualification holder cannot count in the ratios until they complete the relevant competency related to the qualification. This is relevant for EYE at Level 3 and EYP at Level 2, where both qualifications were available as knowledge only.

Level 2 qualifications

We have one Level 2 EYP qualification which can be found on the [NCFE website](#) and below:

- [NCFE CACHE Level 2 Diploma for the Early Years Practitioner | NCFE](#).

T Levels – full and relevant

As the leading sector specialists, we were delighted to have been selected by government to develop the technical qualification for the Education and Early Years T Level which launched in 2020. To find out the key facts about T Levels, [read our handy infographic](#).

The qualification supports students to have an understanding of holistic development, educational curricula and theoretical conceptual knowledge across the age range of birth to 19 years of age. Students must complete a core knowledge of learning arranged as 12 elements with synoptic external assessment. In addition to the achievement of this broad core knowledge base, students will then specialise in a particular aspect of education and childcare and can currently select ONE of the following occupational specialisms (OS):

- Assisting Teaching
- Early Years Educator
- Supporting and Mentoring in Educational Settings.

As an employer in an early years setting, [when checking qualifications](#), those students with EYE OS identified on their certificate hold the mandated ‘full and relevant’ status for employment in ratio at Level 3 in an Early Years Setting.

In all qualifications that hold a ‘licence to practice’, the role of the training provider assessor is significant. Therefore, if your early years setting supports students on their learning journey, you’ll likely be familiar with assessors visiting the setting to observe and monitor students as they reach their level of practical competence.

T Level students following the EYE OS will have to achieve the EYE practical competencies in this way, and in addition, will be assessed through observations in their second year of study as they participate in three structured activities.

Early Years Educator

The three structured activities are observed by the assessor and unlike the EYE criteria, which needs to be achieved over time, students will now be graded on their performance in the setting. If you have an EYE student completing a T Level with you, ask their assessor about the structured activities to find out when they’re likely to take place and how you can contribute to supporting the student. All three structured observations must be completed for all students during the specified three-month window, which takes place between 1 February and 30 April in the student’s final year.

Students completing this OS will have a full and relevant qualification for employment, pending any additional mandated requirements within the [Early Years Statutory Framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage](#).

Assisting Teaching

Students completing the assisting teaching OS in a school environment will also be required to complete three structured activities which will be graded. If you have an assisting teacher student completing a T Level with you, ask their assessor about the structured observations to find out when they’re likely to take place and how you can contribute to supporting the student.

Moderation

All industry placement achievement will be moderated by NCFE. It's important that employers and training providers share information around moderator visits, as this will involve a member of the NCFE moderation team visiting the student along with the assessor at the setting.

Employer commitments

It's important that employers and training providers work collaboratively in supporting the student through this assessment process, enabling learning, building confidence and competence in the workplace. Students will require time in the workplace to practice and refine their skills and techniques, and your influence as a role model and mentor is truly invaluable.

Students will benefit from discussing their qualification requirements with you, and your cooperation during the assessment process is appreciated in ensuring that the student is able to demonstrate what they have learned to the best of their ability. **This is a celebration of the students' experience at your setting!**

Preparing for students' industry placements

Planning and preparation

- Reach out to your local training provider if you're interested in placing students in your setting
- Decide who's going to supervise and mentor the student, and check that they're willing and able to do it
- Discuss with your training provider how you might need to support students with special educational needs or disabilities
- Work with the training provider to share and discuss student and employer expectations, including induction processes.

During industry placements

- Support the student to develop practical skills to do the job well
- Use planned and unplanned opportunities for students to practise and refine their skills
- Maintain communication with the training provider, informing them immediately if you have any concerns – and remember to keep brief notes of special moments, as these can be shared and celebrated when the training provider visits
- Make sure to diarise any planned visits from the training provider, especially those where formal assessment will take place.

[To find out more, visit the industry placement responsibilities page on DfE website.](#)

Supporting teaching and learning

As well as our T Level in Education and Childcare, students may be studying one of our supporting teaching and learning qualifications. Please be mindful of any funding implications for qualifications overlapping with T Levels for students 16-19.

From September 2014, these qualifications are **NOT** full and relevant for employment in an early years setting – for earlier qualification achievement and to check validity, always refer to the [pre-2014 qualification list checker](#). You can access our suite of Supporting Teaching and Learning qualifications on the [NCFE website](#) and below:

- [NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate in Supporting Teaching and Learning | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Award in Supporting Teaching and Learning | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Certificate in Supporting Teaching and Learning | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Supporting Teaching and Learning | NCFE](#).

Ways we work with employers

We engage with employers both directly and indirectly. For example, employers provide training opportunities for our students, working in partnership with training providers to ensure students working across education and childcare are employment ready, acquiring the competencies needed to achieve their qualification.

Examples of how we engage with employers in a more direct way include:

- guest speakers at our increasingly popular [Student Conferences](#)
- [accessing NCFE's](#) fully-funded, free to access professional development resources from our [CPD Carousel](#)
- contributing to our Career's Toolkit, which includes interviews and articles for those thinking about a career in education and childcare, or the next steps in their training
- [CACHE Alumni](#), a professional, fully-funded and free to access professional network offering access to professional articles, trends and developments
- our [Technical Education Advisory Board](#) (TEAB), a professional validation panel advancing education and childcare
- launching in 2024, our Professional Practice Framework – an NCFE reflective, mentoring and supervision tool for staff and leaders, which supports all those involved in early years education along their professional pathway.

CPD opportunities for setting staff

We have a wide and varied selection of NCFE fully-funded, free to use CPD for your members of staff, as well as a mix of regulated qualifications to upskill your workforce. We offer the following Ofqual regulated qualifications:

- [NCFE CACHE Level 2 Award in An Introduction to Neuroscience in Early Years | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate in Understanding Children and Young People's Mental Health | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate in Understanding Mental Health First Aid and Mental Health Advocacy in the Workplace | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate in Understanding Mental Health in the Early Years | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Award for Special Educational Needs Coordinators in Early Years Settings | NCFE](#)

- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Award for the Early Years Child Development Advocate Programme | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 3 Award in Paediatric First Aid | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 4 Award in Promoting Health and Well-Being Through Physical Activity and Nutrition Co-Ordination in the Early Years | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 4 Award in Special Educational Needs and Disability \(Send\) Leadership and Management in the Early Years | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 4 Certificate for the Advanced Practitioner in Schools and Colleges | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 4 Certificate for the Early Years Advanced Practitioner | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 4 Certificate in Neuroscience in Early Years | NCFE](#)
- [NCFE CACHE Level 5 Diploma for the Early Years Senior Practitioner | NCFE](#).

Contact

We hope that you've found this information useful. If you have any questions or you'd like to be included in any of our direct opportunities with employers as listed above, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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