



Department
for Education

The Experience-Based Route for Early Years

Non-Statutory guidance for Early Years providers, managers, and staff using the Experience-Based Route

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Summary

This is non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It is intended to be helpful to early years providers when carrying out duties relating to the experience-based route for early years staff, but it is not mandatory. The guidance covers how early years settings and managers may implement this route for their staff.

Legislation this publication refers to

This guidance refers to:

- the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework for Group and School Based Providers, and
- the Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards document

These documents are given legal effect by the Early Years Foundation Stage (Welfare Requirements) Regulations 2012 made under powers in the Childcare Act 2006.

Who this publication is for

This guidance is for:

- Registered early years providers required to comply with the [Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework](#) for Group and School-Based Providers
- Early years provider and premises managers
- Early years staff
- School leaders, school staff and governing bodies in schools providing early years provision.

Main points

This guidance outlines the recommended approach for early years providers to carry out the experience-based route for staff in their setting who do not hold the qualifications required to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3. It provides support for providers, decision-makers, supervisors and applicants who intend to use this route.

This route is only available to settings and staff that meet the eligibility criteria that are set out in the [Early years qualification requirements and standards document](#). When using this route, early years providers must follow all requirements included in the Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards document.

Staff who have successfully completed the experience-based route are able to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3 without holding a full and relevant qualification.

They are required to complete the supervised practice period, and then can be included in the staff:child ratios from 1 September.

The experience-based route is optional for providers to implement, and optional for each applicant who may wish to take it. The first section of this guidance sets out the decision-making model for the experience-based route. This includes recommended approaches for decision-making for providers deciding if they want to offer this route to their staff, which members of staff this route might be suitable for, and how to assess if an applicant meets the eligibility criteria to access it.

The eligibility criteria that early years providers, assessors and supervisors, and applicants must meet are outlined in the 'decision making and eligibility in the experience-based route' section of this document. This section includes guidance on the different levels of qualifications achieved in the UK and outside of the UK that are appropriate for this route, and how these can be checked by assessors. It also includes guidance on the requirements that early years providers must meet to offer this route to their employees, and guidance on the requirements for staff responsible for making decisions relating to this route.

The 'starting the experience-based route for applicants' section provides an outline of the process that early years providers, managers and applicants should follow for the experience-based route, from determining eligibility to carrying out the final assessment.

The 'working in the staff:child ratios at Level 3 using experience-based route status' section sets out how applicants who have successfully completed the experience-based route can be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3. This section includes an overview of additional requirements that managers should be aware of before they can include an applicant in the staff:child ratios at this level, the maximum proportion of staff who can be included at level 3 in the ratios using the experience-based route, and the transferability of this status.

The Department for Education recommends that early years providers, managers and staff read this guidance in full when considering offering or accessing the experience-based route.

Introduction

Early years and childcare are a key pillar of the Government's work to break down barriers to opportunity.

To support early years providers to recruit and retain sufficient, skilled staff, DfE has introduced an experience-based route for early years staff. This is an optional route that staff who do not currently hold full and relevant level 3 qualifications can use to gain status to work within the staff:child ratios at level 3 at an early years provider. Early years providers may choose to use this route for their staff where the provider, staff member and manager meet the eligibility criteria and process requirements.

The experience-based route was first included in a consultation on proposed changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework between 31 May and 26 July 2023. The Department for Education then held a technical consultation between 22 April and 20 May 2024, seeking views on the proposed model. Following consultation, the department proceeded with the introduction of this route.

This guidance is to support early years providers, managers, assessors, supervisors and applicants intending to use the experience-based route. It includes the department's recommended approach to introducing this route into settings, and how to proceed through each stage.

The experience-based route is intended to enable suitable staff to progress in their career on the basis of their skills, knowledge and experience. The Government is committed to ensuring that the early years workforce has access to the training and qualifications it needs to continue to deliver high-quality education and care to young children. We are introducing this measure now to support the recruitment and retention of staff in early years settings. In the future, we intend to develop an assessment-only route to a full and relevant qualification which staff holding experience-based route status will likely need to take in order to continue working in the staff:child ratios at level 3.

Process for gaining Experience-Based Route Status

The Department for Education has set eligibility and process requirements for early years providers who wish to use the experience-based route to include staff in the staff:child ratios at level 3. These requirements are set out in the [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#) document and summarised below, and they provide a framework for how this route works in practice.

The process map at Figure 1 (page 9) displays an overview of the experience-based route process, from determining if a provider and educator are eligible, to an educator potentially being granted experience-based route status to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3 should they meet other qualification requirements and conditions. The following sections of this guidance provide more detail about the experience-based route process and requirements.

Decision-making model

- Early years providers are responsible for making assessment decisions about their staff's knowledge, skills and experience, and will decide whether they meet the criteria to work in the ratios at level 3.

Eligibility criteria for staff and providers

- Staff wishing to undertake the experience-based route must hold either a full and relevant level 2 qualification, or a level 3 or above qualification that is relevant to the care or education of children, but is not full and relevant. Staff may also hold qualifications equivalent to the required level 2 or level 3 qualifications, that have been achieved outside the UK.
- Staff wishing to undertake the experience-based route must have worked with early years children (aged 0 to 5) in an early years setting or a related sector in England, for a minimum of one year.
- Early years providers must have achieved specified inspection outcomes at their most recent inspection to offer the experience-based route - see below headed "Provider eligibility to offer the experience-based route". Providers who have not yet been inspected can also offer the experience-based route.

Process requirements

- An educator's existing knowledge, skills and experience must be assessed against the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria in order to undertake the experience-based route, and again to be considered for use in the ratios at level 3.

- Staff undertaking the experience-based route must complete a minimum of 751 to 900 hours¹ of relevant work and supervised practice before the assessor can undertake a final assessment and decide whether they have met the criteria to work in the ratios at level 3.
- Staff who have completed the experience-based route must also hold a Paediatric First Aid certificate and a suitable level 2 English qualification before they can be counted in the ratios at level 3.
- The person making a decision about a staff member's experience-based route status must hold a full and relevant qualification at level 3 or above, and must have worked in an early years setting for a minimum of two years.
- Staff involved in supervising a staff member during the experience-based route must hold a full and relevant qualification at level 3 or above, and must have worked in an early years setting for a minimum of two years.
- Providers must keep records of staff undertaking the experience-based route, alongside evidence of their assessments and decision-making.
- An educator's experience-based route status will not be automatically transferable between early years providers.
- No more than 50% of staff with experience-based route status will be able to count in the ratios at level 3 at any one time at a particular premises.

¹ The minimum period within this range is at the discretion of the manager.

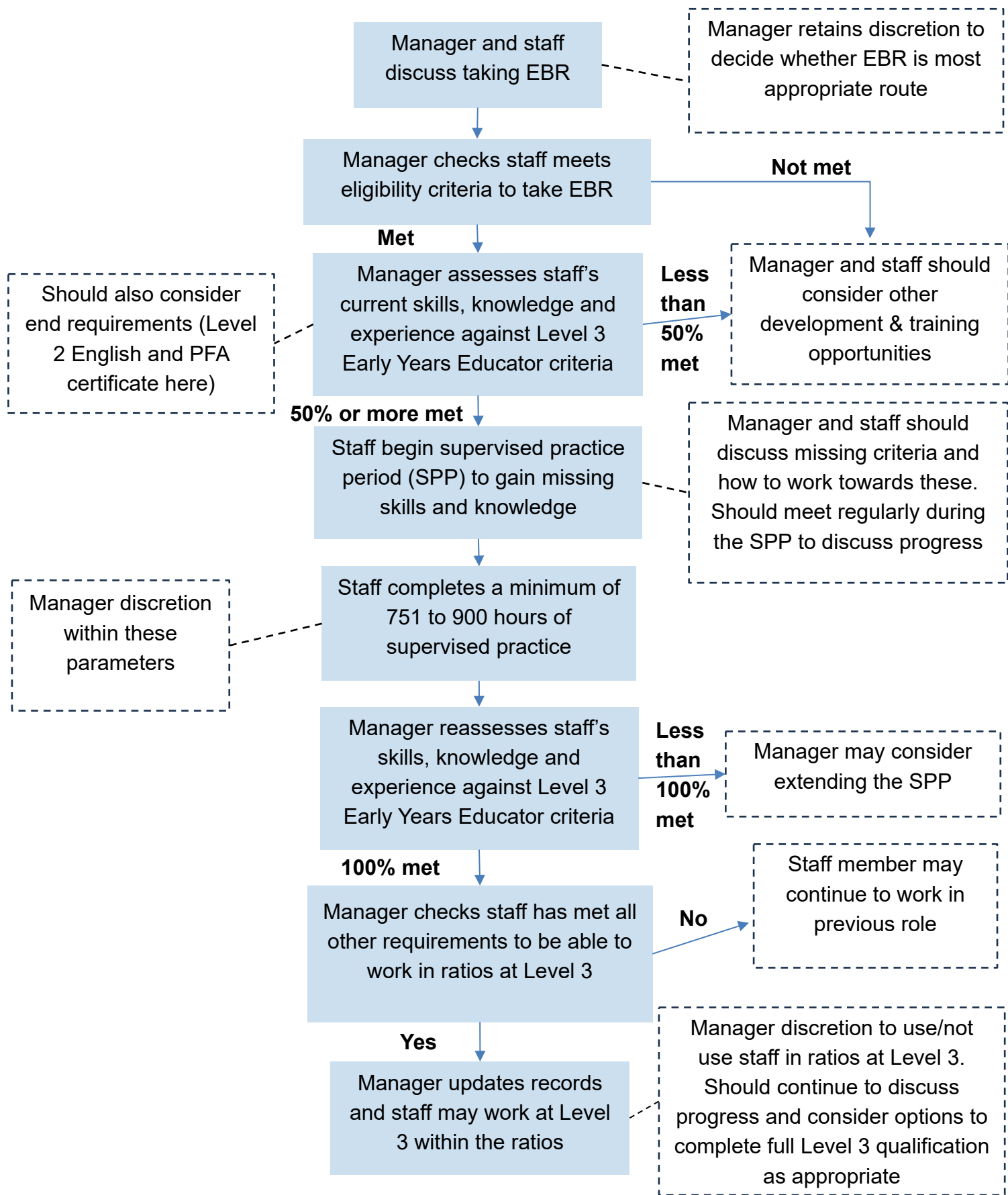


Figure 1: Experience-based route process map

Decision-making and eligibility in the experience-based route

As early years providers are most familiar with the skills and knowledge of their staff and the needs of the children in their care, they are also best placed to decide how to deploy their staff to ensure the most effective outcomes within their settings. As such, **it is early years providers that are responsible for making all decisions relating to the experience-based route**. These decisions could include:

- Whether or not to offer the experience-based route in their setting(s);
- Which staff in their setting(s) should be considered for the experience-based route, and whether those staff are ultimately eligible to undertake the route;
- The final outcome of an educator's experience-based route process;
- The experience-based route status of a new member of staff who successfully completed this route with a previous employer.

It is expected that individual setting managers are responsible for making such decisions on behalf of the provider, but this responsibility may be delegated to another senior member of staff within the setting where this is considered appropriate and where they meet the necessary requirements

Offering the experience-based route

The experience-based route is an optional flexibility available to early years providers who follow the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework for Group and School-Based Providers, and their staff. Early years providers are under no obligation to offer the experience-based route to their staff, and providers should decide whether they will do so based on the suitability of their staff to undertake this route, the needs of the children in their care and whether other development opportunities may be more suitable for their staff.

Even in cases where both provider and educator meet all eligibility requirements, providers retain discretion to refrain from progressing an individual to the experience-based route (in cases where, for example, they consider alternative progression routes to be more suitable).

A member of staff may approach their manager and ask to undertake the experience-based route, or a manager may wish to discuss this option with an appropriate member of staff as part of their continuous professional development.

Assessor and supervisor requirements

If all requirements are met by the provider and educator, and the provider wishes to offer the experience-based route to a member of staff, an initial assessment must be carried

out of the educator's skills, knowledge and experience against the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria; further, an experience-based route candidate reaching the end of their supervised practice period must be re-assessed against the same criteria. More information about the assessment process can be found in the 'Starting the experience-based route for applicants' section of this guidance.

It is the provider's responsibility to carry out and determine the outcome of these assessments. As per the Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards Document from 3 March, the individual making experience-based route assessments on behalf of the provider is referred to as the 'assessor'. The assessor must:

- hold a full and relevant qualification at level 3 or above; and
- have worked in an early years setting for at least two years.

As with general decisions relating to the experience-based route, the manager is expected to fill the role of assessor. However, this is not mandatory; the only requirements for acting as assessor are those set out above, and the provider may choose to nominate another member of staff to carry out assessments as long as these requirements are met.

The provider should also nominate one or more members of staff to supervise and provide support to the experience-based route applicant throughout the process. The assessor may be responsible for, or be involved in, supervision of the experience-based route applicant. As per the Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards Document, the person or persons supervising the applicant during the experience-based route is referred to as the 'supervisor'. The supervisor(s) must:

- hold a full and relevant qualification at level 3 or above; and
- have worked in an early years setting for at least two years.

Provider eligibility to offer the experience-based route

Before identifying potential candidates for the experience-based route, a provider should check if it meets the eligibility criterion to be able to offer this route to staff in their setting. If this criterion is not met, providers cannot offer the experience-based route to any of their staff.

As per the Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards Document, to offer the experience-based route to its staff an early years provider must meet specific criteria for each setting type.

Determining eligibility in providers registered in the Early Years Register

For providers registered in the Early Years Register:

- If the provider's most recent Ofsted inspection took place before 10th November 2025, it must have achieved a judgment of 'outstanding' or 'good' for its overall effectiveness at that inspection.
- If the provider's most recent Ofsted inspection took place on or after 10th November 2025, it must have received a rating of 'met' for safeguarding, and 'expected standard' or above for leadership and governance at that inspection.
- If the provider was most recently inspected by an independent inspectorate instead of by Ofsted, the same inspection outcomes apply but instead of changing on 10th November 2025, the new ratings apply from 5th January 2026.

Determining eligibility in maintained schools, maintained nursery schools and academies ('state-funded school-based providers')

- If a state-funded school-based provider's most recent Ofsted inspection took place before September 2024, it must have received a judgement of 'outstanding' or 'good' for its overall effectiveness to offer the experience-based route.
- If a state-funded school-based provider's most recent Ofsted inspection took place from September 2024 but before 10th November 2025, it may offer the experience-based route unless it is placed by Ofsted into a formal category of concern and was judged to require 'significant improvement' or to need 'special measures'.
- If a state-funded school-based provider's most recent Ofsted inspection took place on or after 10th November 2025 it must have received a rating of 'met' for safeguarding, and 'expected standard' or above for leadership and governance.

Determining eligibility in independent schools

- Independent schools most recently inspected by Ofsted before 5th January 2026, must have received an overall effectiveness grade of 'outstanding' or 'good'.
- Independent schools most recently inspected by Ofsted from 5th January 2026 must have received a rating of 'met' for safeguarding and 'expected standard' or above for leadership and governance.
- Independent schools most recently inspected by an independent inspectorate approved by the Secretary of State for education must be graded 'met' for safeguarding and 'met' for suitability of staff and proprietors.
- Where early years provision at independent schools is registered in the early years register, see the registered provision section above.

Where there is a new inspection

- Where a provider on the early years register or a school has received a previous judgement that allows them to offer EBR as above, and then following a subsequent inspection does not meet the criteria, it will not be able to offer the experience-based route to new applicants.

- If an educator working at that provider has already completed the experience-based route and gained experience-based route status, they may retain that status (at the provider's discretion) while they continue to work in that provider.
- If an educator working at that provider is part way through their experience-based route, they will be unable to progress to the final assessment at that provider.

Where there has not been a previous inspection

- If an early years provider or school has not yet been inspected, then it may offer the experience-based route. Once an inspection has taken place, the conditions set out above will apply.

Determining eligibility in childcare providers on domestic premises registered with Childminder Agencies

For providers of childcare on domestic premises registered with Childminder Agencies, the Childminder Agency they are registered with must have achieved a grade of 'effective' or better in their most recent Ofsted inspection.

Staff eligibility to undertake the experience-based route

After determining that the provider is eligible and wishes to offer the experience-based route to their staff, managers/ assessors must assess if an applicant is eligible.

If an educator does not meet the eligibility criteria to proceed, they will not be able to take the experience-based route. They may, however, work as unqualified members of staff or level 2 members of staff within the staff:child ratios, depending on their existing qualifications. The assessor may undertake a new assessment to determine eligibility for the experience-based route once the eligibility criteria have been met. Managers should consider other possible routes for staff development that they may be able to use. These include:

- Apprenticeships
- Full and relevant level 3 qualifications
- Continuous Professional Development
- Training courses and skills bootcamps

Qualification requirements

As per the Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards Document, to be eligible to undertake the experience-based route an applicant must hold:

- a level 2 qualification that is full and relevant, or an equivalent achieved outside of the UK; or

- a level 3 or above qualification, or an equivalent achieved outside of the UK, that is relevant to the care or education of children, but is not full and relevant.

It is the responsibility of the provider, or person acting on behalf of the provider, to check an applicant's qualification(s) to determine eligibility to take the experience-based route.

Checking level 2 qualifications achieved in the UK

To check whether an applicant's level 2 qualification that was achieved in the UK is full and relevant, the assessor should refer to DfE's [Early Years Qualifications List \(EYQL\)](#).

The EYQL lists all qualifications approved by DfE and therefore enabling holders to work in the staff:child ratios in an early years setting as qualified members of staff. If the applicant's qualification **is** on the EYQL, then it **is** full and relevant. If the qualification is **not** on the list, then it is **not** full and relevant.

The EYQL also includes the level of the qualification. Assessors should check that the applicant's qualification is level 2.

Checking level 2 qualifications achieved outside of the UK

If an applicant holds a qualification achieved outside of the UK the assessor should check that it is equivalent to a UK level 2 qualification, and that the applicant has gained recognition to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 2.

The assessor should firstly check that the applicant's qualification is equivalent to a level 2 qualification as defined by Ofqual in the Regulated Qualification Framework. To do this, the assessor may wish to do one or more of the following:

- Obtain a [Statement of Comparability](#) from UK ENIC
- Obtain an [early years statement](#) from Ecctis
- Refer to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's [guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland](#) (for qualifications awarded in Scotland, Wales or Ireland)
- Refer to [The European Qualifications Framework](#)

If the assessor has determined that the applicant's qualification is equivalent to level 2, they should then check whether the applicant has gained recognition to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 2. To do this, the assessor should contact Ecctis².

Ecctis will compare the applicant's qualification to DfE's Early Years Practitioner (level 2) criteria.

² [Early Years Services](#) (www.ecctis.com/Qualifications/EYS/Default.aspx)

- If the applicant's qualification meets 100% of the level 2 criteria, it is considered to be full and relevant, and the applicant **can be considered for the experience-based route**.
- If the applicant's qualification meets less than 100% of the level 2 criteria, then it is **not** considered to be full and relevant, and the applicant **cannot be considered for the experience-based route** unless the applicant has gained recognition to work in the staff:child ratios at level 2. Please refer to the [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#) document for guidance on gaining recognition for qualifications gained outside of the United Kingdom.

Applicants that have gained recognition to work in the staff:child ratios at level 2 following completion of an adaptation period may be eligible to undertake the experience-based route, provided that all other requirements are met. For guidance on the adaptation process, please refer to the [Early years qualification requirements and standards document](#).

Checking level 3 and above qualifications achieved in the UK

If the applicant holds a level 3 or above qualification that was achieved in the UK, the assessor should firstly verify that the qualification is level 3 or above, as defined by Ofqual. To do this, the assessor may wish to do one or more of the following:

- Refer to the '[what qualification levels mean](#)' guidance on GOV.UK
- Search the [Register of Regulated Qualifications](#)
- Contact the [National Careers Service](#)
- Refer to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's [guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland](#) (for qualifications awarded in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland)

If the assessor has determined that the applicant's qualification is level 3 or above, they should then assess whether it is 'relevant to the care or education of children'.

DfE recommends that qualifications relevant to the care or education of children should include:

- Early years and childcare, teaching, or playwork qualifications
- Health and social care qualifications
- Undergraduate or postgraduate degrees that meet the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject benchmark for [Early Childhood Studies](#), but did not include an element of assessed practice

The above list is not exhaustive, and it is for the assessor to determine whether an applicant's qualification is relevant to the care or education of children. In making this assessment, the assessor may wish to consider:

- The content of the applicant's qualification compared against the level 3 criteria;
- Whether the qualification contained any practical experience of working with early years children (aged 0-5).

If the assessor determines that the applicant's qualification **is** relevant to the care or education of children, **the applicant can be considered for the experience-based route.**

If the assessor determines that the applicant's qualification **is not** relevant to the care or education of children, **the applicant cannot be considered for the experience-based route.**

Checking level 3 and above qualifications achieved outside of the UK

If an applicant holds a qualification achieved outside of the UK, the assessor should check that it is equivalent to a UK level 3 or above qualification, and that it is relevant to the care or education of children.

The assessor should firstly check that the applicant's qualification is equivalent to a level 3 or above qualification as defined by Ofqual in the Regulated Qualification Framework. To do this, the assessor may wish to do one or more of the following:

- Obtain a [Statement of Comparability](#) from UK ENIC
- Obtain an [early years statement](#) from Ecctis
- Refer to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's [guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland](#) (for qualifications awarded in Scotland, Wales or Ireland)
- Refer to the [The European Qualifications Framework](#)

If the assessor has determined that the applicant's qualification is equivalent to level 3 or above, they should then determine whether it is relevant to the care or education of children. To do this, the assessor should either follow the guidance outlined above, or they may wish to contact Ecctis to apply for the Early Years Statement service (which is free of charge).

Ecctis will then compare the applicant's qualification to DfE's Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria and provide a summary of which sub-criteria have been met. The assessor may then use this information to consider whether the applicant's qualification should be determined to be relevant to the care or education of children, or not.

If the assessor determines that the applicant's qualification **is** relevant to the care or education of children, **the applicant can be considered for the experience-based route.**

If the assessor determines that the applicant's qualification **is not** relevant to the care or education of children, **the applicant cannot be considered for the experience-based**

route. Please refer to the [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#) document for alternative options for applicants in this scenario.

Alternatively, applicants holding a qualification achieved outside of the UK may be recognised as qualified members of staff after successful completion of an adaptation period. For guidance on this process, please refer to the [Early years qualification requirements and standards document](#).

Experience requirements

As per the Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards Document, to be eligible to undertake the experience-based route an applicant must:

- have worked with early years children (aged 0-5) in an early years setting or a related sector in England, for a minimum of one year

Related sectors may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Early years and childcare
- Teaching
- Health and Social Care
- Nursing and midwifery
- Social Care
- Playwork
- Counselling and Psychotherapy

It is the responsibility of the provider, or person acting on behalf of the provider, to check an applicant's experience to determine eligibility to take the experience-based route.

The DfE recommends that an applicant's prior experience is continuous (without a break) and immediately preceding the experience-based route, however this is not a requirement and it is for the assessor to decide what is appropriate for their setting. Leave periods of over 4 weeks, including annual, parental or sick leave should not be included when considering an applicant's experience.

Additional considerations

When making their initial assessment to determine if an applicant is eligible to undertake the experience-based route, managers should also take into consideration all additional requirements set out in the EYFS statutory framework for staff to be included in staff:child ratios.

To be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3, staff holding a full and relevant qualification or experience-based route status must also hold:

- a suitable level 2 English qualification³; and
- a Paediatric First Aid qualification, which must be renewed every 3 years.

Applicants who do not meet these additional requirements may progress with the experience-based route, however they will not be able to count within the staff:child ratios at level 3 until these requirements are met.

³ Information on suitable Level 2 English qualifications can be found in the [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#) document.

Starting the experience-based route for applicants

Initial Assessment of applicant for the experience-based route

Where a member of staff meets all of the eligibility criteria to proceed with the experience-based route, assessors must then make an assessment of their skills, experience and knowledge against the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria. These criteria can be found the Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards document. An educator must meet a minimum of 50% of the criteria to proceed to the supervised practice period.

This assessment should include consideration of their experience and demonstrations of their skills and knowledge gained from working with early years children as well as through qualifications achieved. Evidence for this assessment can be gathered from multiple sources, including discussion with the applicant, observation of the applicant at work, and a review of training and qualifications that have been undertaken by the applicant.

Assessors should assess applicants against each of the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria, and evidence their assessment of these clearly. See the 'Experience-based route: Initial and final check form and record' for a suggested template for this assessment.

The department recommends that assessors use specific examples of where applicants have demonstrated each criterion through their experience and/or qualifications, and provide a short explanation of the decision for each criterion. Similarly, where applicants have not demonstrated a criterion, an explanation of why this has not been met should also be provided.

If following this assessment against the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria assessors determine that an applicant meets a minimum of 50% of these criteria, the applicant may then begin their supervised practice period.

If an applicant does not meet 50% of the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria, they are not able to proceed with the experience-based route at that time. Managers may wish to look at alternative development and training opportunities. Applicants may be able to progress with this route in the future should they gain experience, knowledge and skills to meet 50% of the criteria. There is no time limit on when an applicant can be reassessed against the eligibility criteria, this is at the discretion of the assessor.

Supervised Practice Period

During the supervised practice period, applicants should focus on gaining the missing skills, experience and knowledge from their initial assessment.

The supervised practice period is a minimum of 751 to 900 hours, and should be completed in full whilst working for the same provider. This time is calculated in hours worked per day during the supervised practice period and should be recorded as part of an applicant's experience-based route records. There is provider discretion within this timeframe, to recognise that some applicants may not need the full 900 hours to meet the expected standard. See Example box 1 (page 21) for information on how to calculate this for applicants, and how to calculate a guide number of weeks that this period may be.

When calculating hours for an applicant's supervised practice period, managers and supervisors may take into account all hours worked for a provider excluding breaks and annual leave. This may include:

- Time spent educating or caring for children
- Shadowing senior colleagues
- Acting as a key person
- Supporting assessment of children's progress, among others.
- Continuous professional development activities
- Administrative activities for the provider

751 to 900 hours is the minimum time requirement for the experience-based route. If an applicant has not met any missing criteria within this timeframe they may continue working towards this at the manager's discretion. It is also at the manager's discretion whether to place a maximum time limit on completing the supervised practice period.

Managers and supervisors should discuss their initial assessment with the applicant, and work with them to put a plan in place for their development. This should include consideration of opportunities for the applicant to gain the required skills, experience and knowledge during the supervised practice period.

Managers and supervisors should have regular check-ins with applicants to review their progress and record evidence of where Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria have been met with examples. Applicants and supervisors should aim to collect evidence and examples of their development to raise at these check-ins.

Supervisor, Assessor and manager's role

As in the Assessor and Supervisor sub-section above, to act as an assessor or supervisor for applicants progressing through the experience-based route individuals must have the required qualifications and experience. The assessor making decisions for applicants progressing with the experience-based route may also act as the supervisor, or these may be different members of staff. An applicant can have multiple supervisors, providing they meet the eligibility requirements. The supervisor(s) should guide and oversee the applicant undertaking the supervised practice period as they gain skills, experience and knowledge to meet the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria.

Supervisors should continue their day-to-day role as before, and it is for the manager to decide how a supervisor's time is divided between their day-to-day tasks and experience-based route supervision. Supervisors may be asked to take on additional tasks and responsibilities at the manager's discretion that relate to experience-based route supervision. Applicants are not required to be observed or worked with directly for all hours within the supervised practice period. Supervision of an applicant may involve:

- Regular check-in meetings
- Oversight of daily work activities
- Mentoring and coaching of the applicant
- Reviews of progress against the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria
- Collecting evidence and documenting this against the criteria

Recording and documenting an applicant's progress is an important part of the supervised practice period, and should be maintained to a high standard throughout by both supervisors and applicants. This should be ongoing throughout the minimum time period of 751 to 900 hours to allow for detailed record keeping of criteria being met and to inform timings of progress reviews.

It is at the manager's discretion when the supervised practice period should end and the final assessment take place, once the minimum number of hours has been completed. Assessors may use the evidence that they have gathered throughout the supervised practice period and discussion with supervisors and applicants to inform this decision.

Example 1: Supervised Practice Period time calculation guides

All hours worked during the supervised practice period, excluding breaks and leave, should be used to calculate when the minimum requirement has been met. The actual hours worked should be used for the final calculation, and not the guide number of weeks. A record of the number of hours worked each week should be kept by managers or supervisors, and added, until the minimum time is reached.

If your early years provider employs staff with different work patterns, the calculation of their supervised practice period should take this into account.

Full time with annual leave:

If a member of staff works 37 hours per week you would use this figure. For a guide of the number of weeks this would be, divide 751 and 900 each by 37. This would be 21 to 25 weeks of work.

The applicant has 2 weeks of annual leave during this period. In their working hours they are directly educating and caring for children, and also conducting some administrative duties. This applicant would need to work 23 to 27 weeks, including the weeks of annual leave, to meet the minimum requirement. All other hours worked can be included in the calculation.

Part-time work pattern 1:

An applicant works 20 hours per week in their early years provider, not including breaks. For a guide of how many weeks they will need to work, they would divide 751 and 900 each by 20. This would be 38 to 45 weeks of work.

Over a 4 week period this person would work 80 hours, which should be recorded and taken away from the minimum time required.

Part-time work pattern 2:

An applicant works part time, with variable hours from week to week. In this case the number of hours worked should be added until the minimum time period is met.

Week 1: 15 hours; Week 2: 21 hours; Week 3: 7.5 hours; Week 4: 16 hours

This is a total of 59.5 hours of work to be added to the total hours worked.

Early Years Educator (level 3) Criteria Final Assessment

When the minimum time requirements have been met for the supervised practice period and the assessor, supervisor and applicant wish to conclude this process, then the final assessment can be carried out.

Managers, or 'Assessors' should conduct a further check of an applicant's skills, experience and knowledge against the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria. They may wish to use the template document 'Experience-based route: Initial and final check form and record' to guide this final assessment process.

The final assessment takes into account the full range of the applicant's skills, experience and knowledge as evidenced during the initial assessment and during the supervised practice period. As such, evidence from both of these phases of the experience-based route should inform the final assessment.

Applicants must have demonstrated or evidenced 100% of the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria to be granted experience-based route status. These criteria can be found in the [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#) document (Annex E).

Successful - all Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria met

If an applicant is found by the assessor to have met 100% of the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria they may be granted experience-based route status. Where additional requirements and conditions are met this status allows a member of staff to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3 whilst working for the provider that conducted the assessment.

For information on working in the staff:child ratios using experience-based route status please refer to the next section of this guidance document.

Unsuccessful - not all of Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria met

If an applicant does not meet 100% of the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria at the final assessment, they may not at this time be granted experience-based route status to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3.

Applicants are able to continue with their supervised practice period to meet the remaining criteria that they have not yet demonstrated. There is no maximum period for the supervised practice period, and they are able to continue as before to gain the skills, experience and knowledge that they have not yet evidenced. The decision to extend the supervised practice period is at the manager's discretion.

Managers and applicants may also wish to consider not continuing with the experience-based route following an assessment where all of the criteria were not met. In this case managers, supervisors and applicants should consider pursuing other development opportunities that may be suitable for this applicant.

Recording assessment decisions

Assessors should clearly record and document any assessment carried out for an applicant through this process, along with the outcome of that assessment. This includes for applicants who have been granted experience-based route status following assessment, and for those who have not yet met all of the criteria.

Where an applicant is successful a manager may also wish to provide them with a certificate or other form of documentation for their records that states they have experience-based route status. The document 'Experience-based route: Initial and final check form and record' includes a template that may be used by providers for this purpose.

Working in staff:child ratios at Level 3 with Experience-Based Route Status

Where an applicant has successfully gained experience-based route status, there are additional requirements and conditions they must still meet to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3. These are set out in the [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#) document.

Only applicants who have been through the full experience-based route process and met 100% of the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria at their final assessment can be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3 using their experience-based route status if they meet the other requirements.

Additional requirements to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3

There are additional requirements following successful completion of the supervised practice period that must be met before an applicant can be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3 using their experience-based route status. The applicant must:

- Hold a Paediatric First Aid certificate⁴, and the certificate must be renewed every three years to continue meeting this requirement.
- Hold a suitable Level 2 English qualification⁵.

If these additional requirements are not met, the applicant cannot be counted in the staff:child ratios at level 3.

Proportion of staff in level 3 staff:child ratios working with experience-based route status

There is a limit to the proportion of staff able to work in the staff:child ratios at level 3 using experience-based route status. It is for managers to determine how best to use staff in their setting to meet the needs of children and staff whilst meeting the requirements in the statutory frameworks, but providers should take this condition into account when making staffing arrangements.

⁴ Information on suitable Paediatric First Aid certificates is available in the [EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers](#)

⁵ Information on suitable Level 2 English qualifications can be found in the [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#) document.

No more than 50% of staff working in the level 3 ratios at any one time at a particular premises can do so using experience-based route status. The remaining level 3 early years staff must have full and relevant level 3 or higher qualifications. As with staff:child ratio requirements, this proportion applies across the whole setting.

The number of staff able to use their experience-based route status may change dependent on the total number of staff working at a particular premises and their working patterns. Example box 2 (page 26) has examples of acceptable and unacceptable proportions of staff in different circumstances.

This condition does not apply to the proportion of all staff that a provider has in their employment. The total number of staff employed by a setting with experience-based route status, or full and relevant level 3 or higher qualifications, is at the discretion of the provider as long as all EYFS requirements are met.

This condition applies to each premises, or setting, of an early years provider. Larger providers operating at more than one premises should apply this limit to each individual premises and not across multiple premises.

Applicants who have been granted experience-based route status are still able to work in a premises where the maximum proportion has been reached, but may not be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3. They may still be included in the staff:child ratios either at level 2 if they have a full and relevant qualification, or as an unqualified member of staff.

Transferability

Experience-based route status is not automatically transferable between early years providers. Successful completion of this route does not grant an applicant a qualification; it is a status only, and is held only while employed by the provider that awarded it.

If an applicant who holds experience-based route status with their current provider moves to a new role under a different employer, their experience-based route status will not automatically transfer with them. It would be at the discretion of the new employer whether they enable staff holding EBR status to work in the staff:child ratios at level 3; if so, the provider would need to carry out a new assessment of the incoming member of staff and must be satisfied that all level 3 criteria are met in order for that member of staff to continue working in the ratios at level 3 on the basis of their EBR status. A new supervised practice period does not need to be carried out in full, and in their assessment the provider may take into consideration documentation of any assessments and decision-making provided by the educator's previous employer. If the provider determines that the member of staff does not meet all of the level 3 criteria, they may request that a new experience-based route process is undertaken from the beginning (or they may explore alternative training pathways). There is no guarantee that a different provider would be eligible for the experience-based route, or that they would choose to offer this to their employees.

It is at the manager's discretion how this requirement applies in larger early years providers with multiple premises. If the manager deems it appropriate for the member of staff and the children in their premises, it is possible for this status to apply in multiple premises within the same provider.

Ofsted Inspections whilst using Experience-Based Route Status

The Ofsted inspection process will remain the same whether or not an early years provider chooses to offer the experience-based route to its staff. Inspectors will look at the early years provision offered in your setting, and the safety and wellbeing of children. They will not request to look at EBR documents, such as assessment documents that you have recorded for staff that have been through this process. Staff who have experienced-based route status will be treated as any other member of staff would be during an Ofsted inspection.

Example 2: Proportion of staff working in Level 3 ratios

An early years provider has 10 members of staff who can be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3. 5 have full and relevant level 3 qualifications, and 5 have Experience-Based Route status. All of these members of staff work in one premises.

At one time only 50% of staff being included in the staff:child ratios at level 3 can do so using experience-based route status. This requirement applies across a premises, as with staff:child ratios.

Workday 1:

10 members of staff are being included in the level 3 ratios working with children.

5 are using experience-based route status and 5 have full and relevant level 3 qualifications working at the same time.

This is an **acceptable proportion** of staff. This is the maximum number of staff at this time that can be using experience-based route status to be included in ratios at level 3.

Workday 2:

7 members of staff are being included in the staff:child ratios at level 3 at one time.

3 have full and relevant level 3 qualifications and 4 are using experience-based route status.

This is an **unacceptable proportion** of staff. If there are 7 people working in the ratios at level 3 at one time a maximum of 3 may hold experience-based route status.

Workday 3:

9 members of staff are working. 5 in the morning, joined by 3 additional staff in the afternoon.

In the morning 3 have full and relevant level 3 qualifications and 2 are using experience-based route status.

In the afternoon 5 have full and relevant level 3 qualifications and 3 are using experience-based route status.

This is an **acceptable proportion** of staff. In the morning 2 would be the maximum number of staff that can be using experience-based route status to be included in ratios at level 3. In the afternoon when 8 people are working in the level 3 ratios a maximum of 4 people could have experience-based route status. The provider has more staff with full and relevant level 3 qualifications working at that time, which it is able to do below the maximum of 50%.



Department
for Education

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