

Experience-Based Route for EY Practitioners



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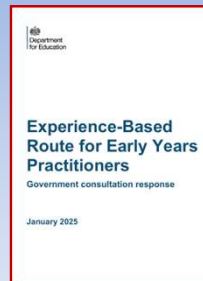
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Experience-based route

A consultation in 2023 proposed changes to the EYFS including a proposal to introduce an experience-based route for early years practitioners to gain status to work within staff:child ratios. In its response the Department noted its intention to proceed with this change. A further technical consultation was launched 22 April 2024 seeking views on the proposed decision-making model for the experience-based route, as well as eligibility criteria and process requirements. The government consultation response was published 29 January 2025. 'We aim to introduce the experience-based route for providers to use from March 2025. Educators completing the experience-based route will then be able to count in the staff:child ratios at level 3 after necessary changes have been made to the ratio requirements in the EYFS, expected from September 2025.'

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6797c4accbd1e3a608a22ce/Experience-based_route_for_early_years_consultation_response.pdf



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Responses

1159 responses, mainly from managers of PVI settings

'In addition to its response to this consultation, Ofsted provided further feedback to the DfE expressing their concern that an experience-based route may negatively impact on the quality of early years provision. This feedback was taken into consideration alongside Ofsted's formal consultation response'.

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Amendments to proposals

DfE will amend the following proposals:

- 'Early years providers must have received a good or outstanding judgement for overall effectiveness in their most recent Ofsted inspection to offer the experience-based route to their staff' will be introduced as an **Interim** eligibility criteria.
- 'The person making a decision about a staff member's experience-based route status, and those 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.' (the original proposal was just 6 months).

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In addition

Feedback from some respondents included that the eligibility criteria for the experience-based route should recognise equivalent qualifications achieved outside of England.

Therefore, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria, educators who have gained their qualifications outside of England will be able to undertake the experience-based route. To meet the qualifications criteria, these educators will need to hold a qualification that is equivalent to level 2 or level 3.

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Main findings



76% either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal that early years providers should decide whether a member of staff meets the criteria to work in the staff:child ratios at level 3 after completing the experience-based route.

17% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal. The consultation questions did not ask for more information but some used the free text boxes provided at questions 29–34 to provide info – a common theme was:

- Allowing providers to make the judgements would mean a lack of objectivity and consistency across providers.

Government response

We want to support the sector to make full use of the wealth of skills, knowledge and experience available within its workforce. We also want the experience-based route process to be as straightforward as possible, and believe that as the ones who know their educators and children in their care best, early years providers are best placed to make decisions as to how they should deploy their educators.

Having carefully considered all the responses, DfE intends to proceed with this proposal. To support providers in decision-making, we have developed accompanying non-statutory guidance. This includes a framework for how the experience-based route should work in practice, alongside a template for providers to use.

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Prior certificated knowledge

"We believe that including both level 2 full and relevant qualifications, and level 3 and above qualifications that are relevant to the care or education of children, but do not appear on DfE's EYQL, within the eligibility criteria for the experience-based route will increase providers' ability to make best use of their experienced educators".

"DfE also intends that, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria, educators who have gained their qualifications outside of England will be able to undertake the experience based route. To meet the qualifications criteria, these educators will need to hold a qualification achieved outside of England that is equivalent to the required level 2 or level 3 qualifications".

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Minimum length of experience

Having considered all the responses, DfE intends to proceed with this proposal, with the eligibility criteria being that anyone wishing to undertake the EBR must have worked with early years children (aged 0 to 5) in an early years setting or a related sector, for a minimum of one year. It is intended that this minimum Experience requirement must have been gained in a setting in England.

One year's experience combined with the proposed minimum hours requirement is also comparable to the typical 18-month duration of a level 3 early years educator apprenticeship. DfE believes that this may also support providers by reducing early-stage turnover and encouraging retention as a notable proportion of educators leave within their first two years.

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Ofsted judgement of the provider

Since September 2024 state-funded schools in England no longer receive Ofsted single headline grade/single word judgements. School Report Cards are expected to be introduced from Autumn 2025. Early years provision in state schools (maintained schools, maintained nursery schools and academies for children aged 2 and above) is included in the removal of headline grades for schools.

All other early years providers will continue to receive headline/single word grades in academic year 2024-2025. There is a commitment to removing headline grades for other providers inspected by Ofsted in future, including early years providers.

In the interim, the following conditions will apply for the experience-based route:

- Early years providers not included in the removal of single headline grades from September 2024, must have received a good or outstanding grade for overall effectiveness in their most recent inspection to offer the experience-based route to educators who meet the eligibility criteria.
- Early years provision in state schools for children aged 2 or above inspected prior to September 2024, must have received a good or outstanding grade for overall effectiveness in their most recent inspection to offer the experience-based route to educators who meet the eligibility criteria.
- Early years provision in state schools for children aged 2 or above inspected in academic year 2024-2025 may offer the experience-based route to educators who meet the eligibility criteria, unless they are placed by Ofsted into a formal category of concern and judged to require 'significant improvement' or to need 'special measures'.
- 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.
- It is intended that for all providers, those who have not yet received an inspection by Ofsted will be eligible to offer the experience-based route to its educators. Once the provider has been inspected, the circumstances set out above will apply. It is also intended that educators who have completed the experience-based route will be able to retain their status if their provider is downgraded following an Ofsted inspection.

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Process requirements

Applicants will need an initial assessment against and meet at least 50% of L3 EYE in order to proceed to ensure that they can gain knowledge and skills to meet any remaining criteria/gaps through a period of supervised practice.

Undertaking this initial assessment will also help the provider and educator to understand the support that may be required throughout the experience-based route.

A reassessment of knowledge, skills and experience after the supervised practice period is necessary for a provider to be able to make a judgement as to whether the educator has met any missing criteria. We believe that providers are best placed to make these assessments, knowing the skills, knowledge and experience of their staff best.

Non-statutory guidance to support provider undertaking the assessments.

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Minimum hours

Educators undertaking the experience-based route must complete 751 – 900 hours 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. This requirement will apply to both full-time and part-time staff.

While undertaking the experience-based route, educators will work to meet any missing sub-criteria against the L3 EYE criteria, and we expect that supervised practice will form part of this process. It will be for providers to decide how the hours of work should be recorded.

It will also be for providers, alongside educators, to decide which tasks and activities should be undertaken during the experience-based route. It is envisioned that these tasks should contribute to developing any missing knowledge or skills the educator has against the level 3 EYE criteria. DfE intends to provide guidance with examples of activities that the provider may wish to consider, but these could include shadowing senior colleagues, acting as a key person or supporting assessment of children's progress, among others.

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Suitable level 2 English qualification

The requirement to hold a level 2 English qualification to be able to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3 already exists for those holding full and relevant qualifications at level 3 and above. DfE believes that the same requirement should apply to those undertaking the experience-based route.



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PFA

There is already an EYFS requirement for practitioners who have obtained a level 2 and/or level 3 qualification since 30 June 2016 to obtain a PFA qualification within 3 months of starting work in order to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 2 or 3. Having more educators with PFA qualifications within the setting helps to ensure the safety of all children and allows any first aid emergencies to be responded to quickly. For this reason, DfE believes that those who have completed the experience-based route must hold a PFA qualification **before** they can be counted in the staff:child ratios at level 3.

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Decision makers and supervisors

DfE intends to amend these proposals to require that decision-makers, and those involved in supervising staff 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. This is comparable to an existing recommendation in the EYFS for setting managers, who should have at least two years' experience of working in an early years setting, or at least two years' other suitable experience. DfE plans to develop accompanying guidance to support providers making decisions, and those involved in supervising educators during the experience-based route.



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Record keeping

The provider must keep a record of hours worked at the setting by the practitioner following the EBR and the outcomes of any assessments they make in relation to the practitioner, with copies to be provided to the practitioner for their own records. The Department recognises the concerns relating to additional workload on managers, but it is important that sufficient records are kept, for both the provider and for the educator, but it will be for them to decide what format those records should be in. DfE intends to publish accompanying non-statutory guidance that will support providers in experience-based route record-keeping.



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Transferability of experience-based route status

The experience-based route is not designed to be a replacement for educators gaining a full and relevant qualification at level 3 or above. Following introduction of the experience-based route, DfE will work with awarding organisations to design an assessment route for educators who have demonstrated that they have the skills and experience to operate at level 3 to gain a full and relevant qualification, but we understand that there is a need to support providers now to better utilise the skills of their existing educators who are otherwise experienced, competent and responsible. DfE also believes that individual providers should have discretion to be able to make judgements as to whether an incoming member of staff who has completed the experience-based route elsewhere is suitable to meet the needs of the children in their setting. This is similar to provision already included in the EYFS around students and apprentices being able to work in the ratios at the level below their level of study at the provider's discretion. This decision would be made by an individual provider, and would not be automatically transferable to a new provider should the educator change employer. Exceptions to this may include cases where educators move to a new setting within the same provider. Further details on instances where experience-based route status could be transferable will be included in the planned accompanying guidance.

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Maximum proportion of staff that can hold experience-based route status

No more than 50% of educators with experience-based route status will be able to count in the ratios at level 3 at any one time at a particular premises. Staffing arrangements must meet the needs of all children, and it is important that all educators have a consistent level of knowledge and skills so that every child receives high-quality education and care. It is therefore important that providers ensure all educators have the experience and training to be able to execute their roles and responsibilities. We know that outstanding practice exists in the workforce at all levels across a wide range of roles. However, to ensure that there remains the right level of knowledge and expertise across an individual setting, DfE believes that it is appropriate that there is a maximum proportion of educators with experience-based route status being used in the ratios at level 3 at any one time.

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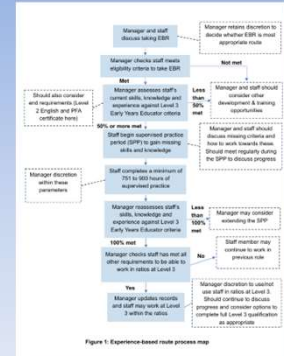
Decision-making model

Early years providers will make 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.



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EBR process map



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Eligibility criteria for practitioners and providers

- Educators 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. Educators may also hold qualifications equivalent to the required level 2 or level 3 qualifications, that have been achieved outside England.
- Educators 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 received a good or outstanding judgement for overall effectiveness in their most recent Ofsted inspection to offer the experience-based route to their educators who meet the eligibility criteria. For state schools inspected during AY 2024/25, the school must not be judged to require significant improvement or special measures. 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.

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Process requirements

Existing knowledge, skills and experience must be assessed against the L3 EYE criteria in order to undertake the experience-based route, and again to be considered for use in the ratios at level 3.

- Educators undertaking the experience-based route must complete between 751 and 900 hours 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.
- Educators who have completed the experience-based route must also hold a suitable level 2 English qualification and must also hold a Paediatric First Aid 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 and staff involved in supervising 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 educators 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.

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EYFS and Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards documents

DfE intends to make changes to the Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards document, and the EYFS for group and school-based providers to bring the experience-based route into effect. DfE aim for the changes to the Early Years Qualifications Requirements and Standards document to come into force in March 2025, and for educators completing the experience-based route to be able to count in the staff:child ratios at level 3 from September 2025 after the relevant changes to the EYFS Framework come into effect. These dates are subject to Parliament passing the relevant regulations.

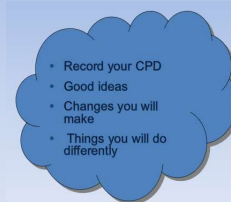
The Government is committed to ensuring that the early years workforce has access to the training and qualifications it needs to continue to deliver high-quality education and care to young children, and that there are robust and accessible routes for all early years educators to gain full and relevant level 3 qualifications. Following introduction of the experience-based route, DfE will work with awarding organisations to design an assessment route for educators who have demonstrated they have the skills and experience to operate at level 3 to gain a full and relevant qualification and continue working in the staff:child ratios at this level.

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Reflection

Please rate your post-course knowledge and confidence scores



What 3 things have you learnt or will you do differently as a result of this training?

What was your Intent?
How will you implement your learning
Show the impact

What is it like to be a child here?

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