

Graduate Practitioner Competencies



Revised March 2026

Striving for Excellence

To ensure the skilful application of knowledge to practices and practices to values and knowledge

Acknowledgements

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¹ A survey for HEI providers and students was circulated to all members of the ECSDN network between September 2025- November 2025. A total of 20 HEIs, and 95 students provided feedback.

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Revisions 2019 and 2026

Following the 2019 QAA Benchmark consultation and the first year of the pilot presentation, this document has been updated to firmly locate the assessment process for practice at Level 6 to the QAA descriptors for a bachelor degree with honours in Early Childhood. A subsequent review in 2026 ensured the Graduate Practitioner Competences were aligned to the reviewed QAA Benchmarks 2022.

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Only membership organisations of ECSDN can embed the competencies into their degree programmes that are mapped on to the QAA Benchmark Statement for Early Childhood Studies.

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Part One

Guidance

Only membership organisations of the ECSDN can embed the competencies into degree programmes that are mapped on to the QAA Benchmark Statement for Early Childhood Studies. Their primary aim is to strengthen the Early Childhood degrees that embed practice.

1. Introduction

It is over thirty years since the first Early Childhood Studies degree students graduated and the **Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN)** was launched. The degree aimed to provide higher-level study opportunities for those working in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector, and since this time, the number of degrees has grown enormously. Early Childhood is now firmly established as an inter-disciplinary academic field in its own right, with a **QAA Benchmark Statement**.

Nutbrown (2021²) calls for qualifications that go beyond technical skills and compliance, advocating for a pedagogical approach rooted in:

- Theory-informed practice
- Critical reflection
- Understanding the unique nature of childhood

This challenges the technicist view of early years work and repositions educators as knowledgeable professionals, emphasising that qualifications must equip practitioners with the knowledge, practices and values needed to support young children’s learning and development. This includes:

- Child development
- Inclusive practice
- Ethics and values
- Leadership and advocacy

To proactively address these issues and strengthen degrees with placements, or that are work-based, the ECSDN has collectively developed assessed practice competencies awarded at Level 6, that evidence the students holistic understanding of Early Childhood development and their ability to apply, critically evaluate and communicate theoretical knowledge to practice. These can be embedded in a variety of ways, including:

- in a specifically designed degree
- as a pathway option

HEIs can award Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner to students who successfully meet all the competencies.

The need for highly qualified graduate Early Childhood practitioners is as relevant today as it was in the early 1990s. The introduction of the Early Childhood Graduate

² Nutbrown, C. (2021). Early childhood educators’ qualifications: a framework for change. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 29(3), 236–249.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2021.1892601>

Practitioner competencies in 2019, as an optional route in degree programmes, is an important development.

This document introduces the competencies and provides supporting information for Higher Education providers, programme teams and employers.

2. Early Childhood Studies Degrees

Early Childhood Studies degrees (ECS) afford students the opportunity to engage with the multiple perspectives on Early Childhood. They promote the critical application of theory to practice with babies, young children and families. Integral to the degrees is holistic knowledge and understanding of the ecology of child development in the context of the family, community and wider socio-political contexts and extends beyond a technicist approach to Early Childhood Education and Care. Anyone who has studied Early Childhood, or taught on Early Childhood Studies Degrees, appreciates how the knowledge, understanding and skills gained support future careers working with children and families.

ECS degrees can be studied in a variety of ways at a range of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and Further Education Colleges with Higher Education provision, across the UK and internationally. Some programmes have an academic focus only, others offer placement opportunities or are employment based. Learners decide to study ECS at different ages, times in their life, with different entry qualifications and reasons. Some students have considerable experience in practice, others have minimal or no experience at all. However, they share an aspiration to work with children and families despite not always being sure of the practice or professional direction they want to pursue.

There are currently five types of degrees mapped on to the Early Childhood Studies QAA Benchmark. Students can study a degree with:

- no placements
- formally assessed placements
- unassessed or sporadically assessed placements
- Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competencies embedded
- a combination of work and study for those in employment

3. The Rationale for Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competencies

A real strength of ECS degrees is the variety of study and career pathways. However, this can present challenges for future employers. Different HEIs use different titles for degrees mapped on to the ECS QAA Benchmark Statements and it is not always clear how the degree maps against sector qualifications, nor prepare students for their future work with children and families.

Full and Relevant Criteria in England for Degrees

According to the DfE (2022) for staff who graduated since 1 September 2014 with a degree in Early Childhood Studies (ECS), or a related degree, to count at level 3 in the staff:child ratios they must have:

- taken a qualification that was consistent with the [QAA subject benchmark statement for ECS](#) (training providers will provide this clarification)
- taken a qualification with an element of assessed performance in an early years setting
- hold a suitable level 2 English qualification

For Early Childhood studies degrees with Early Childhood graduate practitioner competencies:

- Staff who have graduated since July 2019 with a full and relevant qualification as stated on post Sept 2014 qualifications, with an Early Childhood studies degree and Early Childhood graduate practitioner competencies have taken a qualification that was consistent with the QAA subject benchmark statement for ECS.
- They have met Early Childhood competencies demonstrating practice, skills and knowledge at level 6.
- These graduates can be counted as full and relevant at level 3 in the staff:child ratios as long as they:
 - took a qualification with an element of mentored and assessed performance in an Early Childhood setting
 - hold a suitable level 2 English and Math qualification
 - graduated from an institution listed as a member of the Early Childhood Studies Degree Network (ECSDN)

DfE. (2022). *Pathway into Early Years Education*. [Pathway into early years education - GOV.UK](#)

It is the responsibility of the HEI to ensure that the course meets the QAA benchmarks statements in full and students have relevant assessed and observed practice that meets the full and relevant criteria.

They **cannot be counted** as 'Full and Relevant' if they do not meet the criteria as outlined by the DfE. **They need to undertake a relevant level 3 qualification.** For more information please also see:

DfE. (2025). *Early years qualification requirements and standards*. [Early years qualification requirements and standards 2025](#)

The Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competencies aim to:

- Remove the confusion in the sector about how ECS Degrees are aligned to practice requirements in the four nations of the UK.
- Address the inherent challenges of different types of Early Childhood Degrees and study pathways, enabling the wider workforce to be clear about individual early career graduates' expected level of knowledge, skills and actual experience in practice.
- Acknowledge the different pathways that lead learners to undertake the degrees, enhance their practice experience and enhance employability skills.
- Ensure that Higher Education academic routes are responsive to the changing needs and training routes in early years practice, education and the wider Children's Services workforce.
- Make a significant contribution to strengthening a graduate-led Early Childhood workforce that is responsive to workforce needs and improves outcomes for children.
- Afford students with placement opportunities to critically apply theory to practice in a range of Early Childhood settings and/or schools, social care and health settings. This will enable students to develop graduate skills in the application of the interdisciplinary Early Childhood knowledge base to reflective practice.
- Provide new opportunities for graduates who want to strengthen their practice in Early Childhood and/or progress to post-graduate academic programmes or professional training, including Early Years Teacher (0-5), Teacher (3-11), Social Work and health professions.

4. The Role of the Early Childhood Studies Degree Network

- The ECSDN developed the competencies and will review, evaluate and monitor them to ensure they remain contemporary and relevant to the needs of the sector.
- The ECSDN holds the copyright to the competencies so that only ECSDN member institutions can embed them in their ECS degree.
- ECSDN will provide guidance and support on how to embed and assess them to membership organisations.
- The ECSDN will undertake an External Moderating role.

5. Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competencies

Each ECS degree is a bespoke programme and therefore, including Graduate Practitioners Competencies is the decision of HEI providers. They can only be embedded in degrees mapped on to ECS QAA Benchmark Statement.

Quality Processes

HEIs will embed, monitor and award Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competencies through their quality processes. These will include:

- Approval processes
- Annual review
- Subject review
- External examining
- A robust assessment process that is embedded through the degree
- Re-sit opportunities in-line with HEI requirements at Level 4 and 5
- One re-sit opportunity for the final assessment

Awarding Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competencies

The HEI is responsible for awarding the Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competencies. They must provide certification that the student has achieved the competencies, either integrated into the degree title or as a separate certificate.

For example:

- **Embedded in the title:** BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies (Graduate Practitioner)
- **Separate certificate:** Practitioner Competencies has been awarded Early Childhood Graduate

6. Entry, Placement and Assessment Criteria

Entry Requirements

Students must be completing one of the following:

- a **full-time undergraduate degree with honours** (3 Year) that is mapped on to the **ECS QAA Benchmark Statements**
- a **work-based undergraduate degree with honours** (Level 4-6) that is mapped on to the **ECS QAA Benchmark Statements**
- a **top up degree with honours** (level 6) that is mapped on to the **ECS QAA Benchmark Statements** AND hold a full and relevant Level 3 qualification and/or a work-based Foundation Degree (or equivalent) mapped to the ECS QAA Benchmark Statements
- an **Early Childhood post graduate qualification** that is mapped on to the **ECS QAA Benchmark Statements**

On completion of the Early Childhood Graduate Competencies, students must also have achieved Level 2 English and maths qualifications at grade 4 or above or hold a formally recognised equivalent.

6.1 Full-time students

Placement requirements

Students must:

- complete 80 days of work-based assessed placements in a range of Early Childhood settings and/or schools, health or social care settings, across the 0-8 years age range:
 - Level 4 - 25 days (Students with a full and relevant Level 3 qualification in the Early Years can map it to 5 days of placement at Level 4)
 - Level 5 - 30 days
 - Level 6 - 25 days
- receive mentoring support in the setting during the placement
- have assessed placement experience which includes, mentoring and observations of practice by mentors and/or HEI staff, that evidences their development over time. Normally, mentors should be a graduate and/or someone with significant experience and training relevant for Early Childhood Studies. HEIs are responsible for ensuring the quality of placement experiences including mentors and those conducting observations

HEIs must ensure that:

- the quality of the workplace has been rated at least 'good' by a statutory agency
- that specific placement days are identified
- the setting is supportive of the student
- appropriate mentoring is provided by qualified and experienced staff

If Higher Education providers decide to allow students to complete some of the placement requirements in paid employment, they must ensure that:

- the QAA guidelines in relation to what constitutes full time study are followed (<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/contact-hours-guidance.pdf>). It is advisable that appropriate agreements are in place between HEIs, placement providers and/or employers as appropriate.
- students are not exceeding the European Work Time Directive (<https://www.gov.uk/maximum-weekly-working-hours> <https://www.gov.uk/maximum-weekly-working-hours>)

6.2 Employment-based students

Placement requirements

Students must:

- complete 80 days of assessed placements in a range of Early Childhood settings and/or schools, health or social care settings, across the 0-8 years age range INCLUDING at least one placement outside their setting
 - Level 4 - 25 days (Students with a full and relevant Level 3 qualification in the Early Years can map it to 5 days of placement at Level 4)
 - Level 5 - 30 days
 - Level 6 - 25 days
- receive mentoring support in the setting during the placement
- have assessed placement experience which includes, mentoring and observations of practice by mentors and/or HEI staff, that evidences their development over time. Normally, mentors should be a graduate and/or someone with significant experience and training relevant for Early Childhood Studies. HEIs are responsible for ensuring the quality of placement experiences including mentors and those conducting observations

6.3 Early Childhood Top-up (or equivalent) students

Placement requirements

Students must:

- complete 25 days of assessed placements
- evidence knowledge and experience across the 0-8 years age range
- receive mentoring support in the setting during the placement
- have assessed placement experience which includes, mentoring and observations of practice by mentors and/or HEI staff, that evidences their development over time. Normally, mentors should be a graduate and/or someone with significant experience and training relevant for Early Childhood Studies. HEIs are responsible for ensuring the quality of placement experiences including mentors and those conducting observations

6.4 Post Graduate Students

Placement requirements

HEI's need to ensure that all students have:

- a degree
- achieved Level 2 English and maths qualifications at grade 4 or above, or hold a formally recognised equivalent on completion of the competencies
- DBS clearance, or equivalent for international students
- completed 80 days of placement over the 0-8 years age range.
- have placement periods observed and assessed by mentors and/or HEI staff, that evidences their development over time. Normally, mentors should be a graduate and/or someone with significant experience and training relevant for Early Childhood Studies. HEIs are responsible for ensuring the quality of placement experiences including mentors and those conducting observations

6.5 Assessment Requirements

The competencies will be met at different points across the degree with a final rigorous assessment at Level 6. The competencies can only be awarded to those who demonstrate their ability to apply the FHEQ descriptors for a bachelor degree with honours to their practice in Early Childhood. Please refer to the below or the most up to date iteration:

QAA. (2024). The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies. QAA. https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/the-frameworks-for-higher-education-qualifications-of-uk-degree-awarding-bodies-2024.pdf?sfvrsn=3562b281_11

The final assessment will confirm the award (or not) of Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competencies.

The assessment strategy will include:

- Assessed observations of practice throughout each level of the degree
- Practice-based tasks and formalised academic assessment throughout the degree
- Level 6 end of degree assessment point
- Resit opportunities in-line with HEI requirements at Level 4 and 5
- One re-sit opportunity of the final assessment at Level 6
- Robust assessment moderation processes that are monitored through university quality processes

All students must demonstrate their ability to apply knowledge, methods and techniques, critically evaluate and communicate information in relation to Early Childhood practice that evidences³:

- a systematic understanding and coherent and detailed knowledge of Early Childhood
- the ability to analyse, develop and sustain arguments and problem solve
- apply current research to practice and evidence an appreciation of the limits of Early Childhood knowledge
- how to manage own learning, including evidencing how they have used scholarly material and reflection to develop their practice
- how their knowledge has developed over time
- how they have applied their knowledge to specific projects in practice, including their skills in critical evaluation
- how they have exercised initiative, personal responsibility and decision making in complex situations
- the ability to undertake further training or professional qualifications

7. External Examiner Guidance

7.1 Entry requirements

All programmes are subject to their own institutional quality processes, and this will be the main vehicle for ensuring that the programmes, including the competencies, are fit for purpose.

³ Based on QAA. (2022). Subject Benchmark Statement: Early Childhood Studies. Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/sbs/sbs-early-childhood-studies-22.pdf>.

Institutions that are implementing practitioner competencies should seek to appoint or support the training of external examiners with knowledge of the graduate practitioner competencies.

7.2 External Examiners Role

The external examiner role already involves engaging with the quality of the programme, which includes curriculum development, assessment and moderation, and student experience. As the competencies are embedded into or certified alongside the programmes, they should be integral to the students learning experience.

External examiners should include a review in the report on how the Graduate Practitioner Competencies are being included as part of the annual examination.

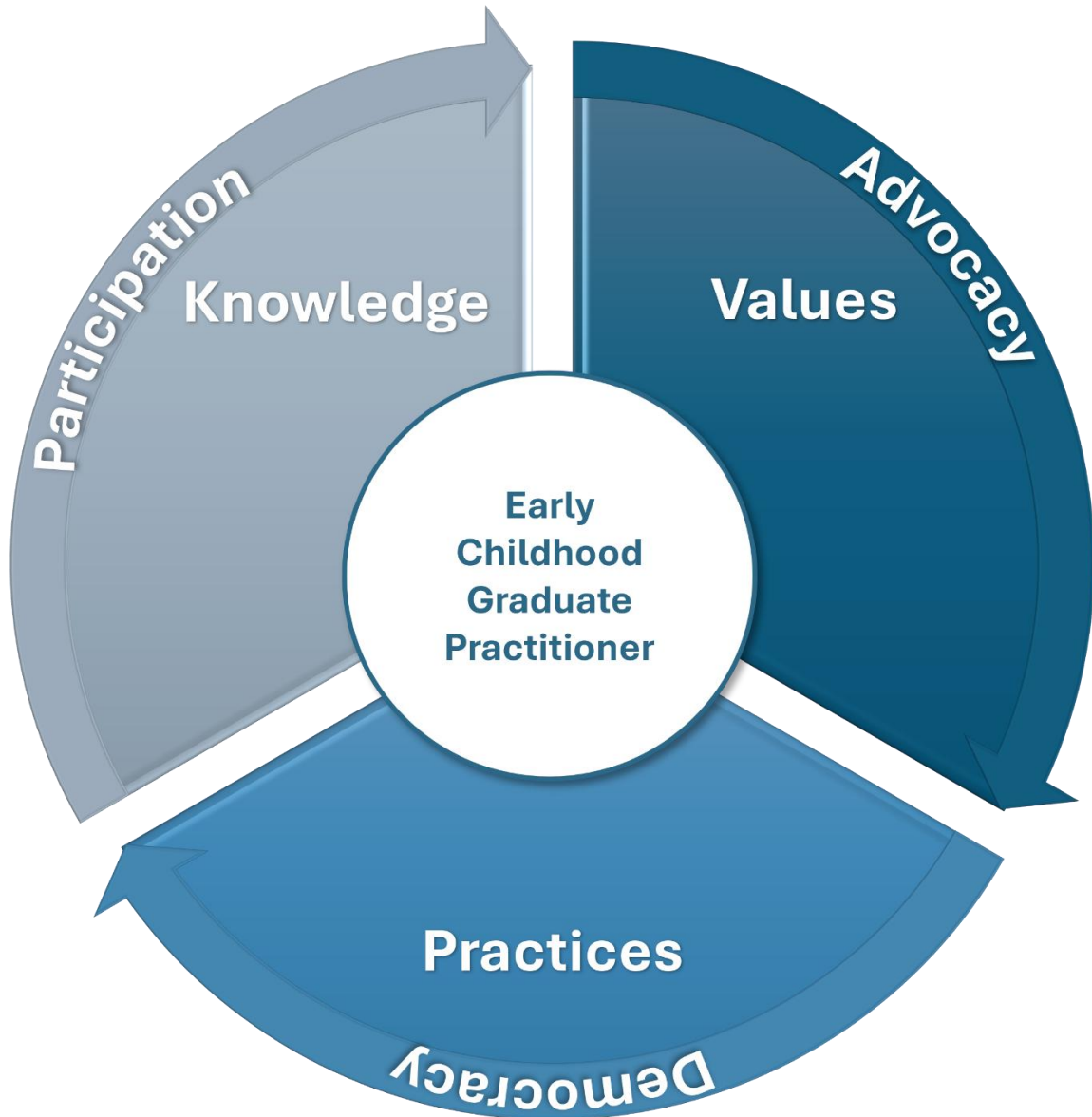
The following guidance should help when assessing the programme and assessment. Comprehensive comments can be added to show how the requirements are being met and any additional comments from the external examiner.

- The ways in which the competencies have been embedded within and/or interlinked with the curriculum and how these are mapped across the programmes
- The documentation, expectation and guidance given to settings and how the placements are arranged, practice observed and assessed by workplace mentors and/or HEI staff
- How evidence is recorded on-line on VLEs and how quality assurance data information and confidentiality issues are addressed
- How the HEIs monitor and assess placement quality and the communication between them and the settings
- The evidence for the practical competencies supplied by the student, rather than focusing on evidence in their written assignments. This is not about writing (eloquently) about meeting practice objectives but evidence from placement (this could take the form of mentor comments, observations, witness statements)
- The levelness of the way in which the students critically analyse their practice
- Listening to the student voice (either directly where this is possible or via student portfolio documentation, evaluations, and similar evidence)
- Provision of feedback to the programme team

Part Two

Early Childhood

Graduate Practitioner Competencies





8. The skilful application of knowledge to practices and practices to values and knowledge.

The Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner is an advocate for babies' and young children's rights and participation and recognises that babies and young children are active co-constructors of their own learning. They critically apply high-level academic knowledge of pedagogy and research evidence to the holistic development of babies and young children (0–8) in a practice context that is respectful of the child, their family, and community.

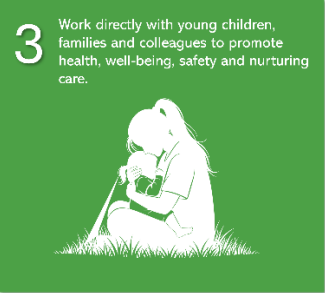
An Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner will have met nine competencies through assessed placement tasks, observations of practice and academic assignments.



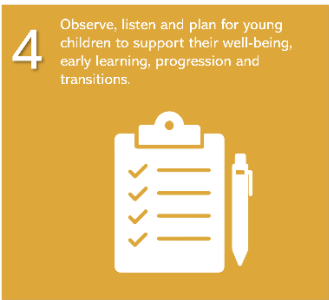
Competence	Knowledge	Practices	Values
<p>1 Advocating for young children’s rights and participation</p>  <p>1 Advocating for young children’s rights and participation.</p>	<p>Graduates will have a critical understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 The principles and frameworks underpinning children’s rights, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and how these inform advocacy and participation. 1.2 The importance of children’s voice as a central tenant of practice. 1.3 The concept of children as active participants in their own lives, learning, and communities, recognising their agency and individuality. 	<p>Graduates will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.4 Listen to and collaborate with young children, individually and in groups, to ensure their voices are heard and valued. 1.5 Observe, support, and extend participation in learning by responding to children’s needs and interests. 1.6 Create opportunities for decision-making and respect for others, fostering inclusive and democratic environments. 1.7 Apply inclusive and ethical approaches to promote children’s rights in everyday practice. 1.8 Reflect on and evaluate practice to ensure it aligns with rights-based and participatory principles. 	<p>The Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner is an advocate for babies’ and young children’s rights and participation and recognises that babies and young children are active co-constructors of their own learning. They critically apply high-level academic knowledge of pedagogy and research evidence to the holistic development of babies and young children (0–8) in a practice context that is respectful of the child, their family, and community.</p>

Competence	Knowledge	Practices	Values
<p>2 Promote holistic child development</p> 	<p>Graduates will have a critical understanding of:</p> <p>2.1 Theories and research on child development from conception to age 8, including neurological, cognitive, language, personal, social, emotional, and physical domains.</p> <p>2.2 The interrelationship between developmental domains and the concept of holistic development.</p> <p>2.3 Factors that promote or impede development, such as family and individual circumstances, attachment, health (physical and mental), well-being, disadvantage, and adverse childhood experiences.</p>	<p>Graduates will be able to:</p> <p>2.7 Observe, assess, and interpret children’s development across all domains, using ethical and inclusive methods.</p> <p>2.8 Apply knowledge to plan and implement experiences that support holistic development, following children’s interests and needs.</p> <p>2.9 Adapt practice to respond to individual differences, family circumstances, and cultural contexts.</p> <p>2.10 Promote learning through play and creativity as central to development, understanding the importance of relationships.</p> <p>2.11 Work collaboratively with families and professionals to address barriers to development and advocate for children’s well-being.</p> <p>2.12 Reflect on and evaluate practice to ensure it aligns with current research, policy, and professional standards, understanding the cultural, historical, and contemporary features of various policies, institutions and agencies, locally, nationally and globally.</p>	<p>The Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner is an advocate for babies’ and young children’s rights and participation and recognises that babies and young children are active co-constructors of their own learning. They critically apply high-level academic knowledge of pedagogy and research evidence to the holistic development of babies and young children (0–8) in a practice context that is respectful of the child, their family, and community.</p>

	<p>2.4 The role of play, creativity, and relationships in supporting learning and development.</p> <p>2.5 The influence of policy, socio-economic context, and cultural diversity on developmental outcomes.</p> <p>2.6 The significance of the cultural, historical, and contemporary features of various policies, institutions and agencies, locally, nationally and globally, regarding children's development and the concept of childhood more widely.</p>		
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Competence	Knowledge	Practices	Values
<p>3 Work directly with young children, families and colleagues to promote health, well-being, safety and nurturing care.</p>  <p>3 Work directly with young children, families and colleagues to promote health, well-being, safety and nurturing care.</p>	<p>Graduates will have a critical understanding of:</p> <p>3.1 Factors influencing health, well-being, and safety in Early Childhood, including physical, emotional, social, and environmental determinants.</p> <p>3.2 Policies, legislation, and statutory guidance relevant to health, and safety in early years settings.</p> <p>3.3 Principles of risk assessment and management, including identification and response to hazards.</p> <p>3.4 Procedures for responding to illness, injury, and medical needs, including urgent and non-urgent situations.</p> <p>3.5 Safe practices for medicine storage and disposal, hygiene, food</p>	<p>Graduates will be able to:</p> <p>3.10 Apply knowledge of health and well-being to create safe, nurturing environments for children. Carry out respectful care routines that support children’s comfort, dignity, and development.</p> <p>3.11 Collaborate with families and professionals to promote healthy living</p> <p>3.12 Integrate nutritional guidance and knowledge into daily routines and promote healthy eating habits.</p> <p>3.13 Complete and implement risk assessments, responding appropriately to identified hazards.</p> <p>3.14 Demonstrate competence in hygiene, food preparation, safe waste disposal, and equipment maintenance.</p> <p>3.15 Know how to implement safe medication practices and respond effectively to medical situations, following emergency procedures (in line with setting policy) and to manage ongoing health conditions.</p> <p>3.16 Collaborate with families and professionals to promote health</p>	<p>The Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner is an advocate for babies’ and young children’s rights and participation and recognises that babies and young children are active co-constructors of their own learning. They critically apply high-level academic knowledge of pedagogy and research evidence to the holistic development of babies and young children (0–8) in a practice context that is respectful of the child, their family, and community.</p>

	<p>preparation, and waste management.</p> <p>3.6 Knowledge of nutritional health, early feeding, weaning, and current dietary guidance.</p> <p>3.7 The importance of nurturing care routines (personal care, mealtimes, rest, sleep, physical activity) for holistic well-being.</p> <p>3.8 Strategies for health education and promotion for children and families.</p> <p>3.9 Approaches to supporting children with ongoing health conditions and accessing relevant training and resources.</p>	<p>education and manage ongoing health conditions.</p>	
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Competence	Knowledge	Practices	Values
<p>4 Observe, listen and plan for young children to support their wellbeing, early learning, progression and transitions</p>  <p>4 Observe, listen and plan for young children to support their well-being, early learning, progression and transitions.</p>	<p>Graduates will have a critical understanding of:</p> <p>4.1 Early Childhood curriculum frameworks and their application in planning for learning and progression.</p> <p>4.2 The significance of observation, documentation, and research methods in understanding children’s development, play, and learning.</p> <p>4.3 Theoretical perspectives on personal, social, and emotional development, and how these inform planning.</p> <p>4.4 The importance of opportunities for children to develop their independence and practice decision-making and problem-solving skills in safe, supportive environments, including</p>	<p>Graduates will be able to:</p> <p>4.11 Apply curriculum frameworks to plan for children’s learning, progression, and well-being.</p> <p>4.12 Use a range of observation and assessment techniques to co-construct learning experiences and identify next steps.</p> <p>4.13 Integrate theoretical perspectives into planning for personal, social, and emotional development.</p> <p>4.14 Support children’s growing independence and decision-making and problem-solving skills through appropriate risk and challenge (e.g., climbing, using tools, exploring new spaces or concepts).</p> <p>4.15 Support children through transitions with sensitivity and evidence-based strategies.</p> <p>4.16 Communicate effectively with children using verbal and non-verbal methods, adapting for diverse needs (EAL, SEND).</p> <p>4.17 Design enabling environments that promote exploration, independence, and balanced pedagogical approaches.</p>	<p>The Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner is an advocate for babies’ and young children’s rights and participation and recognises that babies and young children are active co-constructors of their own learning. They critically apply high-level academic knowledge of pedagogy and research evidence to the holistic development of babies and young children (0–8) in a practice context that is respectful of the child, their family, and community.</p>

	<p>engaging in age-appropriate risk and challenge.</p> <p>4.5 The nature and impact of transitions and strategies to support them effectively.</p> <p>4.6 Principles of communication development, including approaches for children with English as an additional language or special educational needs/disabilities.</p> <p>4.7 Pedagogical knowledge for creating enabling environments indoors and outdoors, balancing child-led and adult-led activities.</p> <p>4.8 Theories and practices related to language, literacy, and mathematical development in Early Childhood.</p> <p>4.9 Contemporary understanding of digital literacies and technology</p>	<p>4.18 Implement activities that foster language, literacy, and mathematical concepts in real-world contexts.</p> <p>4.19 Use technology and digital tools appropriately to enhance learning.</p> <p>4.20 Promote children’s understanding of the wider world, encouraging respect, curiosity, and critical thinking.</p>	
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	<p>in young children's learning.</p> <p>4.10 Strategies to help children understand the wider world, fostering curiosity and cultural awareness.</p>		
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Competence	Knowledge	Practices	Values
<p>5. Safeguarding</p> 	<p>Graduates will have a critical understanding of:</p> <p>5.1 Legislation and statutory guidance for safeguarding, including child protection, whistleblowing, digital safety, and how these inform setting policies.</p> <p>5.2 The wider theoretical perspectives about child abuse, its causes, and implications for children’s development and outcomes.</p> <p>5.3 The concept of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and their impact on resilience, learning, and well-being.</p> <p>5.4 Procedures for recognising and responding to risk, including signs of harm or abuse.</p> <p>5.5 Knowledge of when and how to signpost to</p>	<p>Graduates will be able to:</p> <p>5.9 Apply safeguarding knowledge to identify risks and respond appropriately when a child may be in danger or at risk of harm.</p> <p>5.10 Follow setting policies and statutory procedures for child protection, whistleblowing, and digital safety.</p> <p>5.11 Work collaboratively with colleagues and external agencies to promote children’s safety and well-being.</p> <p>5.12 Integrate understanding of ACEs and abuse into planning to build resilience, support learning, and promote health.</p> <p>5.13 Demonstrate professional judgment in signposting to designated safeguarding leads or external services when necessary.</p> <p>5.14 Recognise and address technology-related risks, promoting safe digital practices for children.</p> <p>5.15 Complete and maintain accurate safeguarding records in line with data protection legislation.</p> <p>5.16 Reflect on safeguarding practice to ensure compliance with legal, ethical, and professional standards.</p>	<p>The Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner is an advocate for babies’ and young children’s rights and participation and recognises that babies and young children are active co-constructors of their own learning. They critically apply high-level academic knowledge of pedagogy and research evidence to the holistic development of babies and young children (0–8) in a practice context that is respectful of the child, their family, and community.</p>


	<p>designated persons or external services to secure protection and support.</p> <p>5.6 The importance of multi-agency collaboration in safeguarding and promoting well-being.</p> <p>5.7 How globalisation and technology introduce new safeguarding risks for young children.</p> <p>5.8 Principles of data protection and confidentiality in safeguarding and wider contexts.</p>		
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Competence	Knowledge	Practices	Values
<p>6 Inclusive practice</p>  <p>6 Inclusive Practice.</p>	<p>Graduates will have a critical understanding of:</p> <p>6.1 Pedagogical principles and approaches that promote inclusion and equity in Early Childhood settings.</p> <p>6.2 How to identify babies and young children who may require additional support, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Protected Characteristics.</p> <p>6.3 Statutory guidance and legislation relating to SEND, equality, and inclusion, and how these inform policy and practice.</p> <p>6.4 The importance of individualised planning to meet diverse care and learning needs.</p> <p>6.5 Strategies for collaboration with families and</p>	<p>Graduates will be able to:</p> <p>6.7 Apply inclusive pedagogical approaches to plan and implement learning experiences that meet the needs of all children.</p> <p>6.8 Identify and assess additional needs, and make appropriate referrals to specialist services.</p> <p>6.9 Integrate statutory guidance into everyday practice to support children with SEND and Protected Characteristics.</p> <p>6.10 Develop and adapt individualised care and learning plans that promote participation and progression.</p> <p>6.11 Work collaboratively with families and multi-agency teams to ensure inclusive and equitable provision.</p> <p>6.12 Reflect on practice to challenge bias and promote anti-discriminatory and culturally responsive approaches.</p>	<p>The Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner is an advocate for babies' and young children's rights and participation and recognises that babies and young children are active co-constructors of their own learning. They critically apply high-level academic knowledge of pedagogy and research evidence to the holistic development of babies and young children (0–8) in a practice context that is respectful of the child, their family, and community.</p>


	<p>professionals to ensure inclusive provision.</p> <p>6.6 The role of cultural competence and anti-discriminatory practice in supporting diversity and participation.</p>		
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Competence	Knowledge	Practices	Values
<p>7 Partnership with parents and caregivers</p> 	<p>Graduates will have a clear understanding of:</p> <p>7.1 The importance of parents and caregivers as children’s first educators and their role in supporting development and learning.</p> <p>7.2 Theories and research on family engagement and partnership in Early Childhood Education.</p> <p>7.3 The diversity of family structures, cultural backgrounds, and societal contexts, and how these influence children’s experiences.</p> <p>7.4 Principles of effective communication and collaboration with families to promote shared understanding and co-construction of learning.</p> <p>7.5 Strategies for inclusive and respectful partnership, recognising</p>	<p>Graduates will be able to:</p> <p>7.6 Build respectful, reciprocal relationships with parents and caregivers to support children’s learning and well-being.</p> <p>7.7 Demonstrate skills in co-constructing learning experiences with families, integrating their insights and priorities.</p> <p>7.8 Communicate effectively using verbal and non-verbal strategies, adapting for cultural and linguistic diversity.</p> <p>7.9 Apply knowledge of family diversity to plan and implement inclusive practices that respect individual circumstances.</p> <p>7.10 Work collaboratively with families to support transitions, progression, and holistic development.</p> <p>7.11 Reflect on partnership practices to ensure they align with ethical, inclusive, and evidence-based principles.</p>	<p>The Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner is an advocate for babies’ and young children’s rights and participation and recognises that babies and young children are active co-constructors of their own learning. They critically apply high-level academic knowledge of pedagogy and research evidence to the holistic development of babies and young children (0–8) in a practice context that is respectful of the child, their family, and community.</p>

	and valuing parental knowledge and contributions.		
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Competence	Knowledge	Practices	Values
<p>8 Collaborating with others</p> 	<p>Graduates will have a clear understanding of:</p> <p>8.1 The importance of professional relationships with colleagues and multi-agency professionals to support children’s learning and well-being.</p> <p>8.2 Principles of effective collaboration, including communication, respect, and shared responsibility.</p> <p>8.3 Common barriers to collaboration (e.g., organisational structures, cultural differences, role ambiguity) and strategies to overcome them.</p> <p>8.4 The role of teamwork and multi-professional approaches in promoting inclusive and holistic practice.</p> <p>8.5 Ethical and professional standards for information sharing and</p>	<p>Graduates will be able to:</p> <p>8.6 Build and maintain respectful, professional relationships with colleagues and external professionals.</p> <p>8.7 Apply collaborative skills such as active listening, negotiation, and shared decision-making in team and multi-agency contexts.</p> <p>8.8 Work effectively as part of a team, contributing to planning, problem-solving, and reflective practice.</p> <p>8.9 Identify and address barriers to collaboration, adapting strategies to promote effective partnership.</p> <p>8.10 Communicate clearly and appropriately to share information and coordinate support for children and families.</p> <p>8.11 Reflect on collaborative experiences to improve professional practice and partnership working.</p>	<p>The Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner is an advocate for babies’ and young children’s rights and participation and recognises that babies and young children are active co-constructors of their own learning. They critically apply high-level academic knowledge of pedagogy and research evidence to the holistic development of babies and young children (0–8) in a practice context that is respectful of the child, their family, and community.</p>

	confidentiality when working with others.		
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Competence	Knowledge	Practices	Values
<p>9 Professional development</p> 	<p>Graduates will have a critical understanding of:</p> <p>9.1 The principles of anti-discriminatory practice, social justice, and valuing diversity, including gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation.</p> <p>9.2 The principles of sustainable childhoods, including how global inequalities and resource use affect children’s well-being now and in the future.</p> <p>9.3 Theories and research on reflective practice and its role in continual professional development and strategies to protect against burn out from emotional labour.</p> <p>9.4 Approaches to leadership and management in Early Childhood settings, and their application in</p>	<p>Graduates will be able to:</p> <p>9.9 Demonstrate self-awareness and apply anti-discriminatory principles in all aspects of practice.</p> <p>9.10 Demonstrate the ability to integrate sustainability into Early Childhood practice by promoting environmentally responsible behaviours, using resources ethically, and advocating for equitable opportunities that support children’s well-being now and in the future.</p> <p>9.11 Use reflective practice tools and draw on research to evaluate and improve professional practice and be aware of their own wellbeing and how to safeguard this.</p> <p>9.12 Apply knowledge of leadership and management to contribute to inclusive, democratic team environments.</p> <p>9.13 Communicate effectively and professionally in oral and written formats, adapting for diverse audiences.</p> <p>9.14 Engage in continuous professional development, using evidence-based strategies to enhance practice and outcomes for children.</p>	<p>The Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner is an advocate for babies’ and young children’s rights and participation and recognises that babies and young children are active co-constructors of their own learning. They critically apply high-level academic knowledge of pedagogy and research evidence to the holistic development of babies and young children (0–8) in a practice context that is respectful of the child, their family, and community.</p>

	<p>democratic and inclusive practice.</p> <p>9.5 Professional standards for effective communication, both oral and written, within multi-professional contexts.</p> <p>9.6 How to use a range of sources of information, including primary sources, and critically evaluate their relevance.</p> <p>9.7 The role of research-informed practice in enhancing quality and innovation in Early Childhood education.</p> <p>9.8 Conduct ethical empirical studies using diverse data collection methods, including ecological observations of Early Childhood, and analyse the resulting data.</p>	<p>9.15 Design, manage and conduct ethical and meaningful research to shape knowledge and practice.</p>	
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9. Graduate Practitioner Competencies (GPCs) – Summary and Evidence Guide

A live summary and interactive evidence guide (e-book) are available to explore at your own pace.

You can find this via our website, <https://www.ecsdn.org/> or via this link: <https://www.ecsdn.org/graduate-practitioner-competencies-2026>



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