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Guide to...

Early Years Teacher Status

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Early Years Teacher Status

Early years teachers come from a diverse range of backgrounds and bring with them many different experiences, but all are dedicated professionals, sharing a passion to make a difference in the lives of babies and young children. Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) is relatively new, but is quickly becoming known to employers as a driver of quality in early years settings across the country.



Early years teachers are graduate leaders specialising in early childhood development, trained to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage for children from birth to the age of five in early years settings and schools. Introduced in 2013, EYTS builds on the achievements of Early Years Professional Status and the training has the same entry requirements as primary teacher training leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Successful completion of an Early Years Initial Teacher Training course leads to the award of Early Years Teacher Status. This award is different to the award of QTS and is designed for those who wish to specialise in work with babies and young children. The role early years teachers play will depend on the type of provision they work in, but whatever the setting, they will bring knowledge, skills and experience and contribute to improving outcomes for young children.

Early Years Teacher Status goes a long way towards professionalising the early years workforce through high-quality graduate-led provision. 'At our university the early years trainees are part of the teaching department and are treated in exactly the same way,' says Jane Joyce, programme leader, early years, at the University of Winchester. 'I feel we had got to a good point with the Early Years Professional

Status programme, and EYTS builds on that work.'

All early years teachers have shown that they meet the Teachers' Standards (Early Years), which have been written to align with the current Teachers' Standards. They are expected to act with integrity and honesty, and to have a strong knowledge of early development that they keep up-to-date. They also need to have an overview of how the Early

Years Foundation Stage fits in with Key Stages 1 and 2, and the ability to forge positive relationships with other professionals and to work with parents and carers in the best interests of children.

The EYTS programme is backed by research showing that teacher-led provision leads to better outcomes for children, with a particular focus on closing the gap between the least and most advantaged. A study from the Graduate Leader Fund in 2011 showed nurseries with a leader with Early Years Professional Status made significant improvements in quality for pre-school children. Recent research from the Nuffield Foundation, meanwhile, showed that where early years settings in disadvantaged areas employ graduates, the quality of provision is higher.

FOR PARTICIPANTS

While many early years teachers are building on existing experience in the sector, for others the role represents a new direction, with backgrounds as diverse as law, geology and marine biology. 'We have trained wonderful professional people – those new to the sector, experienced employees of early years settings and those recently entering early years employment,' says Amy Stancer, course leader for early years at Bishop Grosseteste University.

‘Trainees bring their ideas, experiences and reflections which are shared and develop as a learning community’

There are four different routes to EYTS so applicants can choose the right course for them, based on their existing experience and qualifications. Some highly experienced graduates, who don’t need further training in order to meet the eight Teacher Standards (Early Years), may be able to take the assessment-only route. Graduates already working in a setting can choose the employment-based route while others can take the graduate entry route, and there is also a pathway for undergraduates (see box).

In order to become an early years teacher, trainees will need to show that they meet the eight Teachers’ Standards (Early Years) by completing an Early Years Initial Teacher Training course. The entry requirements for prospective early years teachers are the same as those looking to qualify as primary teachers. Potential students must have achieved a GCSE Grade C or above (or equivalent)

in English, maths and a science subject, and have passed the professional skills tests in numeracy and literacy (sta.education.gov.uk). All applicants must also go through a rigorous interview process designed to assess their suitability to teach, and those taking a graduate route must hold a level 6 degree from a UK higher education institution, or equivalent qualification.

Whatever the route, students will focus on gathering evidence that they meet the eight standards:

- setting high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge all children
- promoting good progress and outcomes
- demonstrating good knowledge of early learning and the Early Years Foundation Stage
- planning education and care taking account of the needs of all children
- adapting education and care to respond to the strengths and needs of all children
- making accurate and productive use of assessment
- safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and providing a safe learning environment

CASE STUDY 1



While spending a year studying for her EYTS with the University of Winchester, Rachel Busby

also found the time to have a baby, now five months old. Ms Busby, currently on maternity leave from her job as teaching assistant at the reception class of St Michael’s Primary School in Figheldean, took the employment-based graduate route to EYTS. She is full of praise for the flexibility of the

course, which allowed her to study while caring for a newborn. ‘It was fantastically flexible – a good way of working around whatever people were doing in any circumstance,’ she says.

Ms Busby saw EYTS as a way of enhancing her existing knowledge. ‘I know so much more now than I did previously about how to help children learn and grow,’ she says. ‘Especially around leadership, but also child development knowledge, which I have been able to pass on to colleagues.’

Ms Busby is also chair of Brambles Pre-School in Figheldean, and has used the skills gained as an early years teacher to enhance the children’s experience with a forest school. In June, the pre-school gained an outstanding rating from Ofsted, something Ms Busby believes is partly down to application of the learning she achieved in early years initial teacher training. The pre-school’s manager is about to follow in Ms Busby’s footsteps and take on EYTS.

- fulfilling wider professional responsibilities (leading practice and contributing to multi-agency working).

Trainees are expected to undertake placements in different settings, such as schools, nurseries and children's centres, to gain experience of working with different age groups. Nikki Fairchild, Early Years Teacher Status programme co-ordinator at the University of Chichester, says, 'A number of trainees have said that the school placement was the most enlightening, and also the different age placements, giving them a real insight into the transitions children make between different stages.' She adds, 'Our trainees have reported a strong aspect of personal growth developed through the programme, whether from the taught sessions, placements, or discussions with other trainees.'

Sharon Falconer, manager of Little Flyers nursery in Amesbury, Wiltshire, qualified as an early years teacher through the undergraduate route at the University of Winchester last year. She says, 'As a professional, being an early years teacher gives you a certain status because it has the word "teacher" in it, it makes people stand up and listen to you a bit more. The whole process affirmed the practice I had was good, and made me much more confident about speaking to other agencies and parents, and able to deliver a good nursery education to the children.'

Early years teachers are finding that they are highly employable – Bishop Grosseteste's Amy Stancer says, 'All of our trainees have been approached with employment following the completion of their training. Some are taking on leadership roles within settings, some as nursery, reception and early years special needs teaching positions. Many of the trainees have found their studies and research towards their PGCE and EYTS so valuable that they will carry on to complete a Masters qualification.'

Jenna Farrow recently completed her EYTS at Bishop Grosseteste and is now employed at Daisychain Pre-school in Lincoln. 'My journey was helped by an empathetic mentor who enabled me to broaden my experience whilst still working in my place of employment,' she says.

ROUTES TO BEING AN EARLY YEARS TEACHER

- 1. Graduate entry:** a full-time, 12-month course for a graduate. The National College for Teaching & Leadership (NCTL), an executive agency of the Department for Education, offers eligible graduates up to £7,000 for course fees, as well as an additional bursary of £9,000 for graduates with a first class degree and £4,000 for those with a 2:1 degree.
- 2. Graduate employment-based:** a one-year part-time route for graduates working in an early years setting. NCTL offers £14,000 to train and support eligible graduates – up to £7,000 to cover course fees as well as £7,000 as a contribution to costs incurred by the employer.
- 3. Undergraduate:** a full-time, three- to four-year route for those who wish to take a level 6 degree in an early childhood-related subject alongside Early Years Teacher training. It is most suitable for those entering the profession, and funding for course fees can be accessed through tuition fee loans from Student Finance England.
- 4. Assessment only:** A three-month, self-funded route for graduates with a great deal of experience of working with children from birth to five years old who can demonstrate the Teachers' Standards (Early Years) without further training, for example an early years teacher from overseas.

There are Early Years Initial Teacher Training places available for 2015/16, and potential trainees have until September to sign up. The programme is currently in the process of identifying training providers for 2016/17 entry.

FOR EMPLOYERS

Settings will benefit from employing a trained graduate who can add value to a nursery team, as they share leadership, skills and expertise, bringing in fresh and innovative ideas. Their overview of child development from birth to five is particularly important as the number of two-year-olds coming into settings is set to increase through the free places scheme.

Sue Craven, manager of Little Owls Nursery in Lincoln, says, 'We have found the experience of training and employing an early years teacher so valuable, the team have enjoyed learning from the trainees and we have been able to reflect on the development of our provision when we have observed and assessed the trainee's impact on children's learning.' She adds, 'The trainee has such a

breadth of knowledge of child development and how to support children with additional needs, we didn't want her to leave. Now she is a wonderful part of the team and a growing leader within the setting.'

Lyndsay Kennedy, manager of Heath Farm Day Nursery, has hosted EYTS students from Bishop Grosseteste University on placement and employed one of the graduates. 'The reason the Early Years Teacher course is so unique is that it challenges and pushes students to be bold in their knowledge, and to inspire change and improvement within the setting,' she says. 'Our early years teacher is full to overflowing with ideas and enthusiasm – based on a broad knowledge of development and of how we can best support children.'

Justyna Ogrodniczek is manager of Elmscot Day

CASE STUDY 2

The majority of Essex-based group Seymour House's nurseries employ a head of early years, whose role is to oversee the standard of care and education, all of whom are qualified early years teachers. But the group is also committed to boosting the number of early years teachers across the team as a whole, and last year introduced its own graduate scheme, which this year will be in partnership with training provider Best Practice Network. Up to 15 more graduates will be joining the scheme in September, which will see them working at one of Seymour House's nurseries while studying to gain their EYTS over the



course of a year.

'As well as their university study, they benefit from training from the Seymour House management team,' explains Jo Nice, head of early years practice at the group. 'They might become our future leaders, the next generation of heads of early years.'

Ms Nice says the benefits to the setting and the children that come from employing early years

teachers are too many to enumerate. 'They inspire the whole team, bringing in fresh and innovative ideas, and encouraging a reflective approach,' she says. 'Their specialist training in meeting the needs of babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers means they can support the whole team in developing different approaches to improve the ways children can enjoy and achieve.' Ms Nice cites the development of a 'thinking house' full of open-ended resources like boxes and tubes, aiming to promote creativity and critical thinking, as just the latest of the many innovations early years teachers have brought to the nursery.

Nursery in Cheshire, which employs four early years teachers, including one who has just achieved EYTS. 'From my point of view I have a qualified member of the team who has a degree and a very good knowledge of child development and leadership skills, and can take on projects,' she says. 'For example, we found out we didn't do enough around supporting schematic behaviour in children, so we met with the early years teachers, who researched the area and created educational resource bags with information about suitable activities and why they worked. Early years teachers are the change agents, they help us impact not only on the children in the pre-school but from the first day children come here as a baby.'

Ms Ogrodniczek is particularly keen on the links that early years teachers create between early years settings and schools, helping early years providers prepare children for the transition to reception classes. 'While she was qualifying, our early years teacher spent time in schools and it is very good that she could go in and observe and understand what is the next step for our children after they leave the nursery,' she says. 'She saw what teachers are expecting and was able to come back and say "we could do more of this"'. The University of Chichester's Nikki Fairchild agrees that early years teachers can help settings build relationships with local schools. 'Some trainees have had placements at their setting's feeder schools, which has helped build relationships between the two,' she states.

The early years teachers at Elmscot – and ultimately the nursery itself – benefit from a network of early years teachers from the Trafford area who meet regularly to swap ideas and support each other, as well as take part in continuing

professional development. The network was started by the local council, but is now largely run by the early years teachers themselves.

EYTS has been developed with employers very much in mind, with settings getting involved in placements, interview processes, and loose partnerships with training providers (see case study 2). The development of the School Direct (Early Years) delivery method also encourages employers' involvement in the selection of trainees and the design and delivery of the training.

It is not just schools and nurseries that can benefit from employing qualified early years teachers. Childminders are also taking up the challenge, like Emma Harris, who heads up Little Caterpillars Early Years and Childcare in Doncaster with her husband Trevor. 'I was aware that many children in my locality come from disadvantaged backgrounds and often they enter nursery and school with skills that are well below those typical for their age,' she explains. 'I believe that high-quality graduate-led early education should not be something that is only accessible to you if your parents happen to live in an affluent part of town or are able to pay huge sums for it. I also saw it as an opportunity to prove that childminders, who are so often seen as "lovely" people who watch your children, can also be professionals held in the same esteem as school teachers.'

FURTHER INFORMATION

- There are more than 15,000 graduates who have trained as early years teachers: more than 13,000 have achieved EYPS and 2,000 have achieved Early Years Teacher Status, with others still completing the programme.

This Guide to... has been produced by Nursery World with support from the Department for Education.

- To find out more about a career in early years teaching including the list of training providers please visit **www.education.gov.uk/earlyyears**.
- Guidance for employers is available at **www.gov.uk/early-years-initial-teacher-training-itt-a-guide-for-employers**.