



Department
for Education

Best Start in Life

- [Early years child development training](#)
- [Excellence in reception teaching](#)
- [Early years leadership national professional qualification \(NPQEYL\)](#)
- [Headship national professional qualification \(NPQH\)](#)

Introduction

On 7 July 2025, DfE launched the [Giving every child the best start in life](#) strategy. This included a commitment to improve the quality of education that children receive in early years settings, including childminders and reception classes.

To support this, we have introduced the following offers, designed specifically for early years educators:

- Additional reception year content in the [Early years child development training](#)
- [Excellence in reception teaching](#), a new training course for reception class teachers
- Increased number of places on the [Early years leadership national professional qualification](#) (NPQEYL)
- Enhanced early years content in the [Headship national professional qualification](#) (NPQH)

The new excellence in reception teaching course forms part of the department's wider, evidence-based 'golden thread' of teacher continuing professional development (CPD). This begins with the initial teacher training core content framework (ITTECF), through to national professional qualifications (NPQ) for more experienced education professionals.

Starts for the NPQ programmes and the excellence in reception teaching course will begin in **Autumn 2026**, with registrations opening on **23 June and 6 July** respectively. Registrations for the early years child development training **are open now**.

Overview

The department is increasing the amount of training that early years educators, including reception teachers, can access.

To support your communications when promoting the offers to your networks and potential participants, the following high-level overview provides a summary of which programme is best suited to individual settings. Further detail about each of the offers is available on the following slides.

Which programme should I take if I am a **current or aspiring leader** working in a:

PVI setting and/or as a childminder	School, including maintained nursery schools (e.g. headteachers, KS1 or Early Years leads)
NPQ Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL)	NPQ Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL)
	NPQ for Headship (NPQH)

Which programme should I take if I am a **practitioner/teacher** working in a:

PVI setting and/or as a childminder	School, including maintained nursery schools (e.g. current or future reception teachers, KS1 or Early Years leads)
Early years child development training	Early years child development training
	Excellence in reception teaching

Early years child development training

- **What are the benefits of taking the programme?** This [free, online training](#) gives participants a thorough understanding of key aspects of child development in the early years. The training includes [8 modules](#) covering essential topics such as brain development; personal, social and emotional development; communication and language; and supporting individual differences and needs. Written by early years experts, the training enables participants to:
 - Strengthen and build knowledge of child development
 - Develop knowledge and understanding of strategies which will develop their practice
 - Test knowledge and reflect on their own practice
 - See examples of effective practice in videos filmed in a range of early years settings
 - Complete online modules in any order, supporting them to develop their knowledge in the best way for them at a time which works for them
 - Download a certificate of completion after each module
 - Access links to additional resources
- **Who is it for?** This training is for practitioners working with children in any type of early years setting. This includes childminders, early years practitioners, reception teachers, and teaching assistants. The training is for anyone who is new to early years and is looking to build their child development knowledge. It is also useful for anyone looking to refresh their knowledge.
- **How much does it cost?** This is a **free**, online, training offer.
- **How long is the programme?** Participants can start and pause the training at any point, so you can complete each module at your own pace. There is no time limit for completing the training.
- **What is the time commitment and how will I learn?** The completion time for each module is approximately 2 hours. Modules are fully online and self-directed.
- **How to apply?** Go to [Early years child development training](#) to find out more information and register.

For:

- EY practitioners
- Childminders
- Teaching assistants
- Reception teachers

Excellence in reception teaching

- **What are the benefits of taking the programme?** We know that the quality of teaching is the most important in-school factor in supporting pupil outcomes. This funded course will deepen your reception-specific pedagogical knowledge and strengthen your practice through practical, evidence-based approaches to support more children to achieve a good level of development. It will focus on the key areas of:
 - Child development
 - Classroom practice and teaching
 - Inclusive practice
 - Effective partnerships
- **Who is it for?** Teachers who currently, or are shortly expecting to, teach the reception year group and who want to build on their existing reception-specific pedagogy but are not looking for CPD at a leadership level.
- **How much does it cost?** Courses are **funded** by the Department for Education for participants in suitable state-funded settings.
 - ***To note:** early years educators in private, voluntary or independent EY settings and childminders are not eligible for DfE scholarship funding for this course, as the target audience is reception year teaching in schools. Providers can offer the course to those working outside of eligible settings, but individuals or settings would need to self-fund these places. If participants are unsure, they can contact a provider directly, or DfE can confirm if they are eligible for funding when they register.*
- **How long is the programme?** Approximately **two school terms**, with **two cohorts per academic year** in Autumn and Spring.
- **What is the time commitment and how will I learn?** A minimum of 20 hours across the course with a mixture of flexible self-study and live, facilitated sessions (which may be accessed online).
- **How to apply?** Visit [Excellence in reception teaching](#). Registrations open on **6 July** for an Autumn 2026 start date.

For:

- Current reception teachers
- Experienced teachers looking to move into reception

NPQ in Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL)

For current or aspiring leaders working:

- In schools
- In PVI's
- As a childminder

- **What are the benefits of taking the programme?** The [NPQEYL](#) provides high-quality, evidence-based early years leadership training, enabling you to be a more confident and effective early years leader. The programme will help you gain confidence and develop skills in:
 - Delivering high-quality early education and care
 - Organisational management and staff development
 - Working with parents and carers
 - Leading staff effectively to support all children, including those who have additional and special educational needs
 - Implementing improvements
- **Who is it for?** Current or aspiring leaders in the Early Years Sector, qualified to at least Level 3 (or equivalent) with a full and relevant qualification who are:
 - Managers or room leaders of private, voluntary and independent nurseries (PVI's)
 - Childminders with leadership responsibilities
 - Headteachers or leaders of school-based or maintained nurseries
 - Other early years foundation stage leaders, such as reception class teachers or early years co-ordinators
- **How much does it cost?** The NPQEYL is **funded** by the Department for Education for participants in publicly funded early years settings and maintained nursery schools. Check eligibility [here](#).
- **How long is the programme?** 18 months, with **one cohort per academic year** starting in November.
- **What is the time commitment and how will I learn?** Involves an average of 1-2 hours of study each week, with a mix of self-study and live group sessions.
- **How to apply?** Go to [Apply for a national professional qualification \(NPQ\) - GOV.UK](#). Registrations open on **23 June** for a November start date.

NPQ for Headship (NPQH)

For current or aspiring headteachers working in schools

- **What are the benefits of taking the programme?** The [NPQH](#) supports school and college leaders who are, or want to be, a headteacher or head of an educational setting. It will equip you with focused leadership knowledge, which you can use to establish the culture and conditions where staff and pupils can thrive.

You'll be encouraged to apply and translate what you've learned, with your training provider giving you models and examples that'll help you translate theory into practical skills you can use in your own setting.

From Autumn 2026, the NPQH is being enhanced so relevant participants can access **more early years specific content**.

- **Who is it for?** This programme is for school leaders who are or are aspiring to be headteachers or head of an educational setting. Depending on the breadth of their remit, leaders of maintained nursery schools or of school-based nurseries may find the [NPQEYL](#) to be more suitable.
- **How much does it cost?** Programmes are **funded** by the Department for Education for participants in suitable settings. Check eligibility [here](#).
- **How long is the programme?** 18 months, with **one cohort per academic year** starting in November.
- **What is the time commitment and how will I learn?** Involves an average of 1-2 hours of study each week, with a mix of self-study and live group sessions.
- **How to apply?** Go to [Apply for a national professional qualification \(NPQ\) - GOV.UK](#). Registrations open on **23 June** for a November start date.

Other CPD Offers

There are a number of other DfE CPD opportunities aimed at early years and reception year educators:

- [Early years stronger practice hubs](#) provide advice, share good practice and offer evidence-based professional development for early years settings.
- The [Nuffield Early Language Intervention \(NELI\) programme](#) targets reception-aged children who need extra support with their speech and language development.
- [English Hubs](#) and [Maths hubs](#) offer a range of support to schools to support the teaching of English and mathematics.
- The [reception networks](#) programme is a national initiative to improve the quality of reception year provision and support more children to start school ready to learn.
- Visit the department's [reception improvement offer](#) for information on the wider support and professional development offer for improving teaching and leadership of reception.
- The Education Endowment Foundation's [Early Years Toolkit](#) provides a summary of evidence on key areas for learning and development in early years.
- The [Early years level 3 SENCO](#) is intended to support early years practitioners to gain accreditation for the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to perform the Early Years SENCO role effectively.