Version 2.0



# Level 3

## Apprenticeship Assessment for

## Early Years Educator (ST0135)

nqual.

APPRENTICESHIP SPECIFICATION

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**This document is a sample version of the NQual Apprenticeship Specification Pack.**

# Introduction

This Apprenticeship Specification provides the requirements, advice, and guidance for the assessment of the NQual Level 3 Apprenticeship Assessment for Early Years Educator (ST0135). It outlines the assessment components, timelines, and expectations for apprentices, employers, and training providers, and is structured to cover all relevant aspects of the assessment process.

The information in this Specification is based on the Skills England Assessment Plan for the Early Years Educator Apprenticeship. For reference, you can access the official document: *Early Years Educator Assessment Plan | Skills England*

The Early Years Educator Apprenticeship provides learners with a structured, supportive route into early years education. It develops professional behaviours, practical skills and theoretical knowledge, alongside English and maths, through a blend of hands-on experience in childcare settings and planned off-the-job learning activities.

## Reference Glossary

Below is a reference glossary of the new Skills England terminology, with a brief explanation of what each term means. You might want to refer to this table when using this document.

| New Term / Process | What it Replaces | What it Means |
|---|---|---|
| **Apprenticeship Specification** | New Concept | NQual designs Apprenticeship Specifications to support employers, learners and training providers in their delivery of Apprenticeship Standards. This document also outlines the assessment requirements in full. |
| **Training Provider / Approved Centre** | New Concept | Both terms refer to the organisation that delivers the on-programme training for an apprentice.<br>Approved Centre refers to those who have undergone additional quality and compliance checks with NQual and are approved to undertake assessments on NQual's behalf, as per the CASS strategy.<br>Training Providers refers to those who have chosen the NQual Approach and have not undergone additional quality and compliance checks with NQual and are not approved to undertake assessments on NQual's behalf. |
| **Gateway to Completion** | Gateway | Final checkpoint before an apprenticeship certificate can be requested. Confirms the apprentice has met all completion requirements (English & maths, any mandatory qualifications, and behaviours). |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Employer Verification of Behaviours** | NQual Assessment of Behaviours | Employers confirm the apprentice has sufficiently demonstrated the behaviours in the occupational standard. NQual no longer assesses behaviours. NQual requires behaviours to be confirmed as achieved prior to finalising 'Gateway to Completion'. |
| **Apprenticeship Assessment Plan (AAP)** | End-Point Assessment Plan | The document sets out how a specific apprenticeship is assessed: assessment outcomes, assessment requirements/components, and performance descriptors. NQual are required to use the Apprenticeship Assessment Plans (AAP) to design their Apprenticeship Specification |
| **Assessment Organisation (AO)** | End-Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) | The organisation responsible for designing, quality assuring and (where applicable) delivering the apprenticeship assessment. NQual is the Assessment Organisation. |
| **Assessment Outcomes** | New Concept | Broad statements group knowledge and skills to describe how an apprentice demonstrates occupational competence. Each knowledge/skill statement maps to one outcome; all outcomes must be fully assessed in every version. |
| **Performance Descriptors** | New Concept | Describe the level of performance needed for a pass or distinction. They bridge assessment outcomes and NQual's grading approach and support comparability; apprentices are not marked directly against them.<br><br>Performance Descriptors have been set by Skills England, prescribed for each level. |
| **Mandatory Knowledge and Skills Statements** | New Concept | The subset of content in an AAP that must be assessed in every version of the assessment. Other statements must still be assessed but can be covered over time. |
| **Sampling** | New Concept | A structured approach allowing NQual to assess across the full range of non-mandatory content over time, rather than every statement in every assessment version. |
| **Centre Handbook** | Centre Handbook | A document specifically for Approved Centres who are undertaking apprenticeship assessment on behalf of NQual, outlining key policies and processes to support success. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Mandatory Assessment Component** | New Concept | Featured in the AAP. The single assessment method that must appear in every version of an assessment, giving a common feature regardless of when/where the assessment happens. NQual may add optional Components from the set list in the AAP. |
| **Mandatory Qualification (MQ)** | Mandated Qualification | An additional qualification required for completion (for legal, professional-body or sector requirements). Depending on coverage, an MQ may be the sole assessment or sit alongside an apprenticeship assessment. |
| **Pass / Distinction** | Pass / Merit / Distinction | The standard grades under reform. Merit has been removed to improve consistency and fairness across apprenticeships. |
| **Resits and Retakes** | Same Concept | Resit = resitting without further training<br>Retake = further training, then reassessment.<br>Apprentices can choose to resit/retake to achieve a higher grade. |
| **Skills England** | IFATE / Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education | The body is now responsible for occupational standards and apprenticeship assessment plans, working with DfE, Ofqual and OfS. |

## Important Information for Employers

The Early Years Educator apprenticeship assessment has been updated as part of national assessment reform led by Skills England. These changes are designed to reduce duplication and ensure assessments reflect occupational competence.

### Key changes include:

Assessment timing can be flexible and based on apprentice readiness, and the 'Gateway Period' has been replaced by the 'Gateway to Completion' process. Apprentices can now complete some or all their assessments on programme; at least one assessment should be towards the end of the programme.

Employers are responsible for verifying that apprentices have sufficiently demonstrated the behaviours set out in the occupational standard before 'Gateway to Completion'.

Assessment Organisations (AO) and Training Providers (TP) are no longer required to assess behaviours themselves. This ensures behavioural judgements are made by those with direct workplace insight and supports a more streamlined and appropriate assessment approach.

### Gateway to Completion will take place once the apprentice has:

- Passed both assessment components.
- The employer has verified completion of behaviours.

- Achieved their Paediatric First Aid or Emergency Paediatric First Aid qualification.
- Achieved any Maths and English qualifications required in line with funding and employer rules.

## Entry Requirements

- Minimum age: 16 years old.
- Apprentices must be employed in a relevant Early Years setting for the duration of the programme and should hold a valid and current DBS in line with employer requirements.

# Assessment Options

NQual offers two options for Apprenticeship Assessment:

- The NQual Approach.
- The Approved Centre Approach.

## The NQual Approach

If providers choose this option, NQual will complete all assessment components.

### Registration

Apprentices must be registered on ACE360 at least 90 days before their first assessment. Assessments can take place on the programme in any order.

Training Providers are required to complete the NQual Booking Form, confirming that the apprentice, training provider and employer agree that the apprentice is ready to complete the assessments.

Booking forms must be submitted via ACE360 by the following time frames:

- Observations: at least 4 weeks prior to the requested assessment date
- All other assessment components: 2 weeks prior to the requested assessment date

Where booking forms are not completed within the timelines, preferred dates might not be accommodated.

### Results

Results will be sent to the apprentice, the training provider and uploaded onto ACE360 within 10 working days after the completion of each component.

Following completion of all assessment components, training providers must submit Gateway to Completion evidence in line with the requirements set out in the Gateway to Completion section of this document. NQual will confirm completion within 48 working hours of all evidence being uploaded.

### Resits and Retakes

For standards comprising multiple assessment components, apprentices will only be required to resit or retake the component(s) in which they have been unsuccessful.

Apprentices may also choose to resit an assessment component with the aim of improving their grade; however, an increased grade cannot be guaranteed.

There is no formal cap on the number of resits and retakes, and the grade achievable is not restricted through reassessment attempts. However, it is strongly recommended that the apprentice is adequately prepared prior to re-assessment to minimise repeated attempts.

All resits and retakes must be completed within 12 months of the initial fail notification. Each resit or retake is subject to employer agreement and confirmation of apprentice readiness prior to booking, additional fees will apply.

NQual's approach to resits and retakes will not limit an apprentice's ability to achieve a distinction grade or place a cap on the grade an apprentice can achieve.

## The Approved Centre Approach

If providers choose this option, specified components of the assessment can be undertaken by the approved centre. These components are carried out in line with NQual's CASS strategy and are subject to ongoing External Quality Assurance (EQA).

Centres wanting to use this approach must undergo NQual's Centre Approval process prior to registering and undertaking any form of assessment of any apprentices. If you would like to become an NQual Approved Centre, please contact *admin@nqual.co.uk* for our helpful NQual Centre Approval Process Guide.

Centres must declare conflicts of interest in advance, and apprentice tutor/assessors must not undertake formal assessments.

When choosing this approach, all independent assessors and internal quality assurers (IQA) details must be recorded and approved by NQual and are subject to EQA review to ensure competence. Please see 'Assessment Assessor and IQA Requirements' within this document. Independent Assessors conducting apprenticeship assessments on behalf of NQual are subject to initial standardisation and the completion of an 'Assessor Declaration'.

### Registration

Apprentices must be registered on ACE360 at the start of the programme, within 60 days of the start date, and will be subject to ongoing EQA activity.

For assessment components delivered by the Centre, NQual must be notified of the assessment date and time at least 2 weeks in advance, by completing the NQual Booking Form, which must be uploaded to ACE360.

When the apprentice is ready to be assessed by NQual for the Observation with Question and Answer, the Centre must complete the NQual Booking Form, confirming that the apprentice, employer, and Centre agree that the apprentice is assessment ready. NQual will then schedule and deliver the Observation with Question and Answer component.

### Results

All results remain subject to confirmation through NQual's External Quality Assurance process.

For the NQual assessed component, results will be sent to the apprentice, the training provider and uploaded onto ACE360 within 10 working days after the completion of the component. Results from the optional component, completed by the centre, will be subject to additional external quality assurance, and results will be confirmed within 10 working days.

Following completion of all assessment components, centres must submit Gateway to Completion evidence in line with the requirements set out in the Gateway to Completion section of this document. NQual will confirm completion within 48 working hours of all evidence being uploaded.

### Resits and Retakes

NQual must be informed of booked resits and retakes via the NQual Booking Form, uploaded to ACE360. The resit and retake terms set out under the NQual Approach apply equally to the Approved Centre Approach.

For standards comprising multiple assessment components, apprentices will only be required to resit or retake the component(s) in which they have been unsuccessful.

Apprentices may also choose to resit an assessment component with the aim of improving their grade; however, an increased grade cannot be guaranteed.

There is no formal cap on the number of resits and retakes, and the grade achievable is not restricted through reassessment attempts. However, it is strongly recommended that the apprentice is adequately prepared prior to re-assessment to minimise repeated attempts.

NQual's approach to resits and retakes will not limit an apprentice's ability to achieve a distinction grade or place a cap on the grade an apprentice can achieve.

All resits and retakes must be completed within 12 months of the initial fail notification. Each resit or retake is subject to employer agreement and confirmation of apprentice readiness prior to booking, additional fees will apply.

## Assessment Design

The Apprenticeship for Level 3 Early Years Educator requires the completion of two assessment components.

To meet the assessment requirements of this apprenticeship assessment, apprentices must complete one mandatory component and one optional component. The mandatory component for this apprenticeship standard is Observation with Question and Answer (Q&A) which must take place in person and in the workplace. For this standard, it has been outlined that the mandatory component must be completed by NQual. The Q&A is to be completed directly after the Observation on the same day.

The apprentice, employer and centre must choose one optional component from this list:

- Professional Discussion
- Case Study Based on a Child Study

# Mandatory Component

## Observation with Question and Answer

The Observation with Question and Answer allows the apprentice to demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills in real practice. This assessment component must be completed by NQual and should be completed after 6 months.

### Timings

The Observation must last 60 minutes and take place face-to-face in the apprentice's usual workplace. Simulation is not permitted.

A 15-minute Question and Answer section (+/- 10%) must take place directly after the Observation on the same working day.

The total assessment time for this component is 75 minutes.

### Additional Consideration

An independent Assessor from NQual will undertake this component. The observation will not be recorded for safety and safeguarding perspectives; the Question and Answer section will be recorded for quality purposes.

The purpose of the Question and Answer section is to capture additional evidence that was not demonstrated during the observation or to seek further clarification.

Details of all criteria covered in this component can be found in the Component Mapping Table within this document.

NQual must have a minimum of 4 weeks' notice when booking an observation.

# Optional Components

## Option 1: Professional Discussion

The Professional Discussion component should take place typically after month 6.

### The NQual Approach

The Professional Discussion is a structured discussion conducted remotely by a qualified Independent Assessor from NQual.

The apprentice will complete the assessment in a controlled environment, ensuring they are alone in the room and free from any external influence, in accordance with the required assessment conditions.

Apprentices are allowed to bring with them the NQual approved 'Self-Assessment Document', which apprentices can prepare in advance and take with them to their assessment. This document should be submitted at least 2 weeks in advance to NQual along with the NQual booking form. Apprentices can also bring an additional notes page on the template provided by NQual.

Details of specific criteria assessed in this component are provided in the Component Mapping Table within this document.

Where an apprentice requires their Professional Discussion to be conducted face-to-face, NQual will aim to sequence the Observation and Question and Answer and Professional Discussion one after the other on the same working day, in line with operational requirements.

### The Approved Centre Approach

The Professional Discussion is a structured discussion conducted by an independent assessor from the approved centre. The Centre can choose to conduct the assessment either face to face or remotely; a video/audio recording must be provided for either option for quality assurance purposes.

The recording alongside the provided NQual grading document must be uploaded to ACE360 within 10 working days of the completed assessment date. Once uploaded, the assessment decision will be externally quality assured by NQual within a further 10 working days.

The apprentice must complete the assessment in a controlled environment, ensuring they are alone in the room and free from any external influence, in accordance with the required assessment conditions.

Apprentices are permitted to bring with them the NQual approved 'Self-Assessment Document', which apprentices can prepare in advance and take with them to their assessment. This document should be submitted in advance to NQual along with the NQual booking form. Apprentices can also bring an additional notes page on the template provided by NQual.

Details of specific criteria assessed in this component are provided in the Component Mapping Table within this document.

### Timings

This Professional Discussion must last 45 minutes (+/- 10%), from the point the apprentice is asked their first question.

### Assessor Responsibilities

Throughout the assessment, apprentices should not receive feedback. Assessors are responsible for ensuring assessment conditions are followed, and complete and record in full the Assessor Declaration.

All assessments, with the exception of the practical observation, must be video/audio recorded in line with NQual's Assessment Processes for quality and compliance purposes. If recordings are not received, NQual reserves the right to request a resit.

## Option 2: Case Study Based on a Child Study

A case study requires the apprentice to evaluate a specific problem or scenario. The problem or scenario may be based on a real-life workplace situation. A case study requires the apprentice to apply theory, evidence or frameworks to understand the context of their case. The apprentice is also required to evaluate issues, draw conclusions or make recommendations on their case.

The Case Study component should take place towards the end of the programme, typically after month 6.

The written case study must not exceed 3,000 words. Appendices can be submitted but will not be counted towards the word count.

The Case Study Based on a Child Study will be based on a case study that the apprentice has done with an individual child or a group of children. Apprentices will have access to a suggested report structure and further information about this component within the Apprentice Support Pack. The suggested structure of the case study includes:

1. Introduction.
2. Child Context, Scope and Objectives.
3. Observation Evidence.
4. Holistic Development and Influencing Factors.
5. Evaluation of the Learning Environment.
6. Planning and Next Steps.
7. Conclusion, Recommendations and Reflection.

The case study should demonstrate the apprentice's ability to review observation evidence, plan appropriate learning experiences based on different stages of development and reflect on inclusive and responsive practice. The apprentice should be working towards the assessment outcomes outlined within the Component Mapping table in this document.

## The NQual Approach

The Case Study Based on a Child Study is a written assessment with a maximum word count of 3,000 words. The apprentice must complete the report independently. Any referenced material must be cited appropriately, and the report must not include plagiarism and must not be produced, in whole or in part, using artificial intelligence. Please refer to NQual's Malpractice and Maladministration Policy regarding the use of AI and plagiarism.

The report must be submitted via ACE360, on the approved NQual Submission Documentation.

The report will be marked by a qualified Independent Assessor from NQual within 10 working days of the submission.

## The Approved Centre Approach

The Case Study Based on a Child Study is a written assessment with a maximum word count of 3,000 words. The apprentice must complete the report independently. Any referenced material must be cited appropriately, and the report must not include plagiarism nor permit the use of Artificial Intelligence. Please refer to NQual's Malpractice and Maladministration Policy regarding the use of AI and plagiarism.

The report must be submitted on the approved NQual Submission Document and uploaded to ACE360.

The report must be assessed by an Independent Assessor from the Centre and uploaded within 10 working days of the completion date. Once uploaded, the assessment decision will be externally quality assured within a further 10 working days of the submission date given on the booking form.

## Timings

The apprentice has a maximum period of 14 weeks to complete their case study, and observation evidence should be collected over a period of 10 weeks, with a further 4 weeks for write up.

### Assessor Responsibilities

Throughout the assessment, apprentices should not receive feedback. Assessors are responsible for ensuring assessment conditions are followed, and complete and record in full the Assessor Declaration.

All assessments, with the exception of the practical observation and written report must be video/audio recorded in line with NQual's Assessment Processes for quality and compliance purposes. If recordings are not received, NQual reserves the right to request a resit.

## Assessment Materials

The required assessment materials, including live assessment documentation are available to Approved Centres and Training Providers. These materials support centre preparation and assessor standardisation and should be reviewed before delivery commences. Materials are available via ACE360, with Approved Centre Assessment materials being shared directly with each centre following standardisation and training.

Please note that, to align with sampling requirements, regular review of Approved Centre Assessment materials will be completed by NQual's Quality Team, which will result in assessment material updates and version changes. These will be communicated in advance, and a clear start date will be indicated on each. When apprentice bookings are confirmed, NQual will provide the relevant assessment materials.

Centres must use the correct assessment materials; if outdated assessment materials are used, NQual reserves the right to request a resit of assessments where they deem appropriate.

## Apprentice Assessment Timelines

| Step | NQual Approach | Approved Centre Approach |
|---|---|---|
| Sign-up | Apprentice signs up with their training provider/centre. | |
| Registration | Apprentices registered on ACE360 at least 90 days before first assessment. | Apprentices registered on ACE360 within 60 days of their 'sign-up' date. This must be before learners complete any assessments. |
| Learning | On-programme learning | |
| Booking Assessments | Training Providers should use NQual's Booking Form to book the Observation at least 4 weeks prior to the required assessment date.<br><br>Training Providers must complete the NQual Booking Form at least 2 weeks prior to the Optional Component: Professional Discussion/ Case Study based on a child study. | Centres should use NQual's Booking Form to book the Observation at least 4 weeks prior to the required assessment date.<br><br>Centres should inform NQual using the NQual Booking Form at least 2 weeks before the Optional Component: Professional Discussion/ Case Study based on a child study. |
| Assessments | All assessments components are conducted by NQual's Independent Assessors. | NQual's Assessor will complete the Observation.<br><br>Approved Centre will complete the optional component (Professional Discussion or Case Study based on a Child Study)<br><br>Centres submit their evidence using NQual's required paperwork within 10 working days of completion. |
| Results | Results of the component conducted by NQual will be sent within 10 working days after each assessment component.<br><br>If an apprentice fails an assessment component, they must book a resit or retake using the NQual booking form. | Results of the component conducted by NQual will be sent within 10 working days after the assessment component.<br><br>Final confirmed results of centre assessed components will be issued by NQual following completion of the EQA process within 10 working days of confirmed uploaded evidence. |
| Gateway to Completion | The Training Provider / Centre provides evidence of:<br>• Both components achieving Pass or Distinction<br>• Maths & English evidence<br>• Employer-verified Behaviours.<br><br>NQual confirms Gateway to Completion. | |
| Certification | NQual applies for the apprenticeship certificate. | |

# Assessment Assessor Requirements

Assessment Assessor and IQA Requirements remain the same regardless of the Option chosen.

## Assessor Requirements

- Assessors must hold a relevant assessor qualification, such as the Level 3 Certificate in Assessing Vocational Achievement (CAVA). Assessors currently undergoing training must have all assessment decisions confirmed by a suitably qualified assessor.
- Assessors must also be occupationally competent to assess the standard, typically demonstrated by at least two years of recent experience in Early Years settings, supported by a regularly updated CPD record. This should evidence current, practical experience and knowledge of the Early Years Sector to ensure valid assessment decisions.
- Assessors must be qualified in the subject at the same level or above the standard they are assessing.
- Conflict of Interest: Assessors must declare any personal or professional relationship, or any potential benefit from the assessment outcome.
- Independence: The assessor must be independent from the apprentice to ensure impartiality and integrity in the assessment process.

## IQA Requirements

- IQAs must hold a relevant IQA qualification, such as the Level 4 Award in the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Practice. IQAs currently undergoing training must have all assessment decisions confirmed by a suitably qualified IQA.
- IQAs must also be occupationally competent in the sector area, typically demonstrated by recent and relevant experience, supported by an up-to-date CPD record evidencing current knowledge of industry standards and assessment practices.
- IQAs must be qualified in the subject at the same level or above the standard they are assessing.
- Conflict of Interest: IQAs must declare any personal or professional relationship, or any potential benefit from the sampling process, before carrying out quality assurance activities.
- Independence: The IQA must be independent from the apprentice and assessor, to ensure impartiality and integrity in the quality assurance process.

## Grading and Standard Setting

The available grades for this standard are Fail, Pass and Distinction. To achieve a Pass, all assessment outcomes must be demonstrated to the level described in the performance descriptors in both assessment components to achieve an overall Pass grade.

To be considered for an overall Distinction, the apprentice must first meet all assessment outcomes at the Pass standard in both assessment components. A Distinction will then be awarded where the apprentice achieves a minimum of 50% of the available Distinction criteria in each assessment component.

The final grade will be decided on the following combinations:

| Mandatory Component: Observation with Question and Answer | Optional Component: Professional Discussion or Case Study Based on a Child Study | Overall Grading |
|---|---|---|
| Any grade | Fail | Fail |
| Fail | Any grade | Fail |
| Pass | Pass | Pass |
| Pass | Distinction | Pass |
| Distinction | Pass | Pass |
| Distinction | Distinction | Distinction |

## Gateway to Completion

Gateway to Completion is the last part of the apprentice's journey and requires the training provider/centre to upload evidence that the apprentice is ready to complete their apprenticeship. The Gateway to Completion form must be completed and submitted to NQual, along with required evidence via ACE360.

Requirements for Gateway to Completion:

- Both components have achieved a minimum of a pass grade.
- Evidence of achieving relevant Maths and English qualifications or exemptions where required.
- Evidence is required to confirm that the employer deems the apprentice competent against the required behaviours.
- Evidence of achieving a Paediatric First Aid or Emergency Paediatric First Aid qualification in line with the requirements of the EYFS framework.

## Behaviours

As part of this apprenticeship standard, it is the responsibility of the employer to review behaviours throughout the apprentice's programme and confirm sufficient demonstration of these behaviours before a certificate can be requested. Behaviours do not contribute to the grade.

Below is a list of behaviours the employer is required to confirm for this standard.

| Behaviours | |
|---|---|
| B1 | Confident to have difficult conversations. |
| B2 | Child-centred and empathetic, valuing equality, diversity, and inclusion and the uniqueness of each child. |
| B3 | Vigilant and act with professional curiosity. |
| B4 | Caring, compassionate and sensitive. |
| B5 | Honest, open, respectful, and a role model. |
| B6 | Self-motivated, using initiative and proactive. |
| B7 | Playful and creative. |
| B8 | Reflective and reflexive and committed to CPD. |

## Certification

For this apprenticeship standard, NQual is responsible for requesting the apprentice's certificate once Gateway to Completion has been confirmed.

### Need More Information?

This document is a sample version of the NQual Apprenticeship Specification Pack.

Full versions, assessment materials, guidance documents and additional support resources are available to training providers delivering apprenticeship assessments with NQual.

To discuss the standard or request further information, contact the NQual team at *admin@nqual.co.uk*. or *book a meeting* with team

Book Your Meeting

nqual.

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