Apprenticeship Assessment

VQA Level 5 End-Point Assessment for ST0551 Early Years Lead Practitioner

Standard Specification

Qualification Number: 610/6156/6

Version Number: 1.1

Contents

Key Information 3
Summary 4
- Overview of the Role 4
- Occupation Summary 4
- Typical Job Titles 4
- Professional Reognition 5

Assessment Methods 6
- Assessment Order 6
- EPA Window 6
- Gateway Considerations 6

Observation with Questions 7
- Overview 7
- Observation 7
- Questioning 8
- Grading 8
- Observation with questioning – KSBs and Grading Criteria 8

Portfolio of Evidence 13
Professional Discussion 14
- Overview 14
- Grading 15
- KSBs and Grading Criteria 15

Overall Grading 22
Resits and Retakes 22
Appeals 22

Key Information

Reference:	ST0551
Version:	1.1
Level:	5
Typical duration to gateway	24 months (this does not include EPA period)
Typical EPA period	3 months
Maximum funding	£9,000
Route:	Education and early years
Approved for delivery:	10 August 2021
LARS code:	655
EQA provider:	Ofqual
Date updated:	25 June 2025
Review	This apprenticeship standard will be reviewed in accordance with the change request policy.
Qualification number:	610/6156/6

Summary

Overview of the Role

Working directly with children, skilfully leading day to day practice.

Occupation Summary

This occupation is found in a range of settings which can include day nurseries, playgroups, nursery schools, pre-schools, kindergartens, primary schools, hospitals, social care settings, out of school environments and local authority provision.

The broad purpose of the occupation is to be a proactive and influential practitioner, working directly with children, skilfully leading day to day practice at an operational level. As active practitioners they are effective role models of play based learning, supporting others to develop their own practice.

Theyarehighlyskilledprofessionalswhotakeanoperationalleadforthecare, learning and development of all young children within their care, adapting to individual needs providing inclusive and holistic provision. They engage with sector developments both locally and nationally, with a commitment to developing their own professional and educational competencies.

In their daily work, an employee in this occupation interacts with children aged birth to eight years, families, practitioners, other professionals, and appropriate agencies. An employee in this occupation will be responsible for supporting the quality of learning and development in their setting. They lead on the operational aspects of this provision and are typically responsible for leading other practitioners, an aspect or environment such as; Communication and Language, Planning and Assessment, Forest School, Physical Activity and Nutrition. They usually Report directly to the head of the setting (The Manager, The Leader, The Director).

Typical Job Titles

Room Leader, Deputy Manager, Assistant Manager, Senior Practitioner, Lead Practitioner, PreSchool Leader, Early Years Coordinator, Early Years Practitioner, Nursery Officer, Early Years Officer, Key Worker, Senior Key Worker, Baby Room Leader, Lead Baby Room Practitioner, Play Leader, Early Years Support Worker, Higher Level Teaching and Learning Assistant, Early Years Foundation Stage Lead or Coordinator, Pastoral Care Manager, Pastoral Assistant, Education Welfare Officer,

Specialist Practitioner in Child Development (Health), Community Nursery Nurse, Health Play Specialist, Hospital Play Worker.

Professional Recognition

This apprenticeship aligns with the criteria that early years qualifications must meet to be recognised by the Department for Education as full and relevant for L3. To count within the ratios at level 3, staff holding an Early Years Educator qualification must also have achieved a suitable level 2 qualification in English. Setting managers must hold a suitable level 2 qualification in maths or must achieve one within two years of starting in the position. These are additional EYFS requirements that are independent of the apprenticeship requirements.

Assessment Methods

The end-point assessment (EPA) for this standard consists of two assessment methods/ components:

- Observation with questions
- Professional Discussion underpinned by a portfolio of evidence

Assessment Order

The assessment methods can be delivered in any order. The result of one assessment method does not need to be known before starting the next.

EPA Window

The EPA period starts when VQA confirms the gateway requirements have been met, and is typically five months.

Gateway Considerations

Before the apprentice can start their EPA, the training provider is required to upload the following:

- Photo ID
- Portfolio of evidence

At gateway, the training provider is also requested sign a declaration to confirm that the English and maths requirements have been met in line with the funding rules.

Observation with Questions

Assessment Overview

In the observation with questioning, the End-Point Assessor observes the apprentice in their workplace and asks questions to give the apprentice the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) mapped to this assessment method.

The observed session should form part of the apprentice's normal working day and should reflect their typical working practices, working conditions, and day-to-day duties. Simulation is not allowed.

The End-Point Assessor will conduct and assess the observation with questioning, which must last **90 minutes**. The total time for the observation element is **60 minutes**. The time allocated for questioning is **30 minutes**. The End-Point Assessor has the discretion to increase the time of the

observation with questioning by up to 10% to allow the apprentice to complete a task or respond to a question if necessary.

The observation with questioning may be split into discrete sections held on the same working day. The End-Point Assessor must explain the format and timescales of the observation with questioning to the apprentice before it starts. This does not count towards the assessment time.

Apprentices must be given **two weeks'** notice of the venue, date, and time of the observation with questioning. The observation with questioning must take place in person, in a controlled environment, free from any distractions.

Observation

The End-Point Assessor should observe the apprentice doing the following during the observation:

- interacting with a group of children through an opportunity or experience for learning, based on the session plan
- leading or supervising colleagues during this session
- communicating with parents, carers or guardians of the children under their supervision.

The session plan will be shared with the independent assessor on the day of the assessment, before the observation begins.

The location, number of children and age range varies from employer to employer. Depending on the nature of the setting, some examples of observation sessions could be as follows:

- in a woodland area
- working within messy play
- working with pre-school children

The assessor must only observe one apprentice at a time, and be as unobtrusive as possible.

Questioning

The End-Point Assessor must ask at least seven questions after the observation, to seek clarification where required and to assess the level of competence against the grading descriptors.

They may ask follow-up questions where clarification is required. In addition to the set number of questions for the observation with questioning, the End-Point Assessor must ask questions about KSBs that were not observed to gather assessment evidence, but these should be kept to a minimum.

Grading

The End-Point Assessor must make the grading decision. This assessment is graded fail, pass or distinction, according to the grading criteria.

To achieve a pass in this assessment, the apprentice must meet all the pass criteria. To be awarded a distinction, they must meet all the pass criteria and all the distinction criteria.

If the apprentice does not meet all the pass criteria, this assessment will be graded as a fail.

The Unique Child	
Pass	Advocates in the child's best interest to ensure the child's voice is always heard and respected,demonstrating an inclusive and ethical approach to practice which is responsive and respectful to the individual child and takes account of the social and cultural context.

	Continuously evaluates the quality of the childcare environment. **(K1,S1, S21)**
	Applies current and contemporary theories and approaches when planning and undertaking appropriate personal care routines for individual children to ensure respectful and nurturing care. **(K5, S9, B3)**
	Responds to a child's individual development needs and circumstances, through planning that reflects the child's need for consistent care, as well as adapting to the child's and families' needs during change,including transitions. **(K9, S8)**
	Identifies, actions, addresses challenging issues and undertakes difficult conversations. **(S23)**
Dist.	Demonstrates how their practice challenges both explicit and implicit discrimination, and actively supports children to advocate for themselves, by developing a sense of agency,autonomy, and the skills to impact their world. **(K1, S1, S21)**
K1 Ethical and rights-based approaches to support the child, listening to the child's authentic voice within their social and cultural context enabling advocacy for the child and their individual journey, developing high quality childcare environments that are continuously evaluated.	
K5 Current and contemporary theories and approaches to enable respectful and nurturing personal care.	
K9 Potential effects of transitions and theories and approaches on how to successfully support children and their families.	
S1 Advocate for children through their child centred approach, listening to the voice of the child; ensuring children's rights, views and wishes are heard, respected and acted upon at all times. Offer appropriate support and influence decisions in the best interests of the child.	
S8 Ensure plans fully reflect the individual development needs and circumstances of children and actively participate in the provision of consistent care, responding quickly to the needs of the individual child.	
S9 Plan, carry out and guide appropriate personal care routines for individual children.	

S21 Promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice.
S23 Identify, action and competently challenge issues and undertake difficult conversations where appropriate.
B3 Person centred, friendly and approachable, demonstrating caring, empathetic and respectful qualities.

Learning and Development	
Pass	Applies a responsive approach that is influenced by a range of strategies, to develop and extend children's learning and thinking. **(S5)**
	Observes, assesses, plans, facilitates and participates in play opportunities with children that reflect current curriculum. **(S18)**
	Coordinates an exciting, dynamic, evolving and enabling environment, providing a range of fun, playful and engaging activities that reflect the interests, motivations, and play of individual and groups of children. **(S16)**
	Supports and promotes children's speech, language and communication, adapting their practice to engage in authentic and quality interactions with the child or children to support verbal, non-verbal interactions and engagement with written communication. **(S3, B4)**
	Encourages all children's participation and ensures a sensitive, respectful and effective balance within the adult and child dynamic to facilitate play opportunities. **(S12)**
Dist.	Leads and models practice within the environment to continually provoke, excite and extend children's current interests and motivations. **(S12, S16)**
S3 Support and promote children's diverse speech, language and communication development and determining and adapting appropriate responses and interventions to support verbal, non-verbal interactions and engagement with written communication.	
S5 Engage in effective strategies to develop and extend children's learning and thinking, including sustained shared thinking.	

S12 Encourage all children's participation, ensuring a sensitive, respectful and effective balance within the adult and child dynamic to facilitate play opportunities.
S16 Provide a dynamic, evolving and enabling environment that reflects the current interests, motivations, and play of individual and groups of children.
S18 Observe, assess, plan, facilitate and participate in play opportunities which include current curriculum requirements.
B4 Be authentic, playful, animated, responsive, creative, imaginative and curious.

Leaderful Practice	
Pass	Demonstrates a leaderful approach within practice influenced by current theoretical perspectives and approaches. Inspires, motivates and coaches colleagues by modelling innovative and aspirational practice to support and engage others to develop their practice. **(K18, S22, B2)**
	Deploys staff in a way that matches the learning environment, whilst prioritising the safety and wellbeing of all children. Acts as a positive and proactive member of the team, exercising assertiveness and diplomacy. **(S13, B5)**
	Demonstrates current and contemporary influences on their pedagogical approach and practice. **(S17)**
	Implements health and safety practices and carries out risk assessments and risk management processes in accordance with policies and procedures. **(S26)**
	Supports the key person in articulating children's progress and planning future learning opportunities. **(S20)**
Dist.	Confidently applies current and contemporary theoretical perspectives and approaches when taking responsibility for supporting the key person in applying future learning possibilities whilst modelling innovative and aspirational practice to colleagues. **(K18, S20, B5)**

K18 Current and contemporary theoretical perspectives and approaches to leadership and how to support others through leaderful practice, supporting teams and guiding change.
S13 Ensure staff are deployed effectively to suit and enhance the learning environment, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of all children.
S17 Use current and contemporary knowledge, research, theories and approaches to develop, enhance and articulate their own pedagogical approach and practice.
S20 Take responsibility for supporting the key person in articulating children's progress and planning future learning possibilities including the safe use of digital technology to communicate effectively in both oral and written English.
S22 Be a leaderful practitioner to support, mentor, coach, train and guide colleagues in a range of educational settings, providing inspiration and motivation to engage others to develop their practice, supporting teams and guiding change.
S26 Identify and act upon own responsibilities in relation to health and safety, prevention and control of infection, carrying out risk assessments and risk management processes in line with policies and procedures.
B2 Leaderful and motivating through consistent modelling of innovative and aspirational practice to other colleagues.
B5 Positive and proactive member of the team, being assertive and exercising diplomacy.

Portfolio of Evidence

Apprentices must compile a portfolio containing evidence during the on-programme period of the apprenticeship to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) that the professional discussion will assess. The portfolio will typically contain 20 discrete pieces of evidence.

Evidence should be mapped against the KSBs assessed by the professional discussion and may be used to demonstrate more than one KSB. The apprentice must provide evidence for all the KSBs. The training provider must submit the apprentice's portfolio of evidence at gateway, and incomplete portfolios will be rejected.

The apprentice will be required to submit a case study report as part of the portfolio.

The case study report will be based on a case study that the apprentice has completed with an individual child or group of children. It must be based on a real-life workplace situation, based on assessment,observation and planning documentation, which involves the apprentice completing a relevant and defined piece of work. The work must have a real benefit to the child or children or setting the apprentice is working in.

The case study report should include an analysis of observations the apprentice has made. Sufficient time must be allowed to enable the apprentice to observe the child or children over a period of typically six weeks and allow for situations where children may leave a setting for any reason.

Parental consent for children participating in the case study must be gained prior to starting the case study.

Evidence sources in the portfolio may also include workplace documentation and records, for example:

- workplace policies and procedures
- witness statements
- anonymised annotated photographs
- anonymised learning journals
- anonymised risk assessments
- anonymised case notes
- anonymised referral forms.

This is not a definitive list, and other evidence sources can be included. The evidence provided must however be valid and attributable to the apprentice.

Any employer contributions to the portfolio of evidence should focus on direct observation of performance (a witness statement, for example) rather than opinions.

The portfolio of evidence should not include reflective accounts or any methods of self-assessment except for evidence for S24 and B6.

As the portfolio is to underpin the professional discussion, it is not directly assessed or marked. It will only be reviewed to prepare questions for the professional discussion, and the End-Point Assessor will not be required to give feedback on the portfolio after this review.

Professional Discussion (underpinned by a portfolio of evidence)

Overview

In the professional discussion, the End-Point Assessor and the apprentice have a formal two-way conversation to allow the apprentice to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) mapped to this assessment method.

The End-Point Assessor will conduct and assess the professional discussion, which must last for 90 minutes. The End-Point Assessor has the discretion to increase the time of the professional discussion by up to 10% to allow the apprentice to respond to a question if necessary.

The End-Point Assessor must explain the format and timescales of the professional discussion to the apprentice before it starts. This does not count towards the assessment time.

The End-Point Assessor must have at least two weeks to review the portfolio of evidence prior to the professional discussion to prepare questions based on the KSBs identified for this method.

The End-Point Assessor must ask at least eight questions. Follow-up questions are allowed where clarification is required.

The apprentice must have access to their portfolio of evidence during the professional discussion so they can refer to and use evidence from it to illustrate their answers.

Apprentices must be given two weeks' notice of the venue, date, and time of the professional discussion. The professional discussion must take place in a suitable

venue such as the employer's premises, in a controlled environment, free from any distractions.

The professional discussion can take place remotely, conducted by video conferencing using Microsoft Teams.

Grading

The End-Point Assessor will make all grading decisions. This assessment is graded fail, pass or distinction according to the grading criteria.

To achieve a pass in this assessment, the apprentice must meet all the pass criteria. To be awarded a distinction, they must meet all the pass criteria and all the distinction criteria.

If the apprentice does not meet all the pass criteria, this assessment will be graded as a fail.

Professional Discussion – KSBs and Grading Criteria

Legislation and Guidance	
Pass	Explains the role of the designated lead for safeguarding and assimilating findings of reviews and assessments of significant incidents or cases. Explains current legislation and guidance and how this is implemented through policy and procedure. Outlines their own responsibilities, knowing when to question and challenge others, including their own professional curiosity, regarding safeguarding and protecting children. **(K6, K21, S10, S11)**
	Evaluates the strategies they apply when collaborating and cultivating partnerships with parents or carers stakeholders and multi agencies. **(K10, S14)**
	Explains the importance and impact of inclusion, equality, and diversity and how to promote and embed consistent and impartial strategies that value equality in leaderful practice, within professional boundaries. **(K17, B1)**
	Explains the current administration and records systems they use and how they share oral and written information in line with the security and confidentiality policy, and current legislation. **(K20, S25)**
	Explains how they manage efficient and sustainable practice when using resources, applying reuse, recycling, and safe disposal principles. **(K22, S27)**

Dist.	Justifies their rationale for decision making with regards to safeguarding and protecting children, drawing on policies and procedures and their professional insight and curiosity. **(K6, S10, S11)**
	Critically reflects on opportunities to recognise and challenge discriminatory processes, behaviours and attitudes and how these impact the child and family. **(K17, B1)**

Legislation and Guidance
K6 Local and national child protection and safeguarding statutory and non-statutory frameworks, policies and procedures in practice, how to identify when a child is at risk, and how to challenge in order to protect them. This includes understanding the role of the designated lead for safeguarding and assimilating findings of reviews of serious cases.
K10 Strategies to effect collaborative approaches to working with parents, carers, colleagues, professional bodies and multi agencies.
K17 How to promote inclusion, equality and diversity in the sector and why it is essential.
K20 Ways to use, record and store data and information securely and in line with data protection legislation, confidentiality requirements and local and national policies, including the safe use of digital technology to communicate effectively in both oral and written English.
K21 The current and relevant policy, statutory and non-statutory guidance and legal requirements as appropriate to the sector within; local, national, historical and global contexts including SEND. The impact of these contexts on effective provision.
K22 Principles of sustainability and efficient use of resources, in line with recycling, reuse, and safe disposal of waste.
S10 Competently action and carry out safeguarding procedures, using their professional curiosity, knowledge, insight and understanding.
S11 Explore and understand, challenge and question; knowing when to act to safeguard and protect children.

S14 Cultivate professional partnerships with parents, carers, colleagues and other professionals, presenting their understanding of the child's journey within multidisciplinary teams to holistically support the child's individual needs.
S25 Ensure the security and confidentiality of data, records and information in line with current legislation.
S27 Apply the principles of sustainability and segregate used resources for reuse, recycling, and safe disposal .
B1 Ethical, fair, consistent and impartial, valuing equality and diversity at all times within professional boundaries.

Health & Wellbeing	
Pass	Analyses theories of self-regulation, resilience and wellbeing and the importance for children's holistic development and life experiences. **(K4)**
	Explains the importance of considering pedagogy when evaluating the curriculum's intent, implementation and impact and how strategies are developed and modelled to ensure the emotional, psychological, physical and cultural needs of all children within the setting are met. **(K14, S2)**
	Analyses how they promote and support children and families to develop a healthy approach to making choices about activities and lifestyle. **(S6)**
Dist.	Compares and contrasts different pedagogies, justifying the choices made, by illustrating the impact of decisions made on emotional, psychological, physical and cultural development of children in the setting. **(K14, S2)**
K4 Theories of self-regulation, resilience and well-being and the impact of adverse early childhood experiences.	
K14 The intent, implementation and impact of all provided experiences and opportunities for children informed by the setting's curriculum and pedagogy.	
S2 Develop, model and implement strategies to support the emotional, social, psychological, physical and cultural needs of all children within the educational setting.	

S6 Promote, model and support children and families to develop a healthy approach to making choices relating to personal care including eating, sleeping and physical activity.	
Continual Professional Development	
Pass	Evaluates how reflection influences their early years practice and drives their commitment to continuing professional development and action research. **(K19)**
	Explains how they use opportunities to reflect on their development both professionally and personally and evaluates how they respond to challenge and constructive criticism. **(S24, B6)**
	Explains how they incorporate theories from physiological, neurological, developmental and education into their development and practice. **(K13)**
Dist.	Analyses the impact reflective practice has on their effectiveness as a lead practitioner, and evaluates how reflective experiences involving challenge and constructive criticism enhance their professional competence. **(K19, S24, B6)**
K13 A wide range of underpinning theories from physiological, neurological, developmental and education and how these can be incorporated to develop own pedagogy.	
K19 Principles of reflection in influencing early years practice with a commitment to life-long learning including continual professional development and action research.	
S24 Use reflection to develop themselves both professionally and personally to enhance their practice.	
B6 Reflective practitioner, receptive and open to challenge and constructive criticism.	

Child Development	
Pass	Analyses how children learn and develop from conception to 8 years within the social, and cultural context and how this impacts their future.

	(K2)
	Analyses factors that can impact upon health, well-being and early learning of children from conception to 8 and how children and families can make healthy and effective life choices. **(K3, S7)**
	Explains theories of attachment they use to promote effective relationships between staff and children. **(K7)**
	Explains how they develop effective and collaborative partnerships with parents and carers considering social and cultural context and influence, and the importance of home learning, and how that partnership enables a greater understanding of the child/children leading to enhanced opportunities. **(K8, S15)**
Dist.	Evaluates approaches to children's development they use in their practice, and articulates how they reach decisions in complex situations. **(K2, K3, S7)**
K2 How individual children learn and develop from conception to 8 years in relation to typical and atypical neurological, cognitive, social, emotional, behavioural, communication and physical development within the social, cultural context and the impact of this on their future.	
K3 Factors that have an impact upon health, well-being and early learning that can affect children from conception to 8 years and how children and families can make healthy and effective life choices.	
K7 Current and emerging theories of attachment and how these relate to promoting relationships effectively such as the key person approach.	
K8 The importance of the social cultural context on the learning and development of the child and the influence parents, families and carers have within the home learning environment and the complexities of the family situation.	
S7 Analyse and articulate how all children's individual learning can be affected by their current developmental capabilities, characteristics and individual circumstances taking into account all factors contributing to typical and atypical development.	

S15 Demonstrate the importance of the home learning environment, developing an effective and collaborative partnership to enhance opportunities for the child.

Observation and Assessment Planning	
Pass	Uses theoretical knowledge of the importance of play, demonstrating how they support children to engage in a range of learning contexts, supporting confidence within social experiences, including how they stimulate children's creativity and curiosity and how this benefits learning. **(K11, K12, S4)**
	Evaluates how planning cycles and formative and summative assessments for child or children inform and improve practice in relation to needs-based assessment and early intervention. **(K16, S19)**
	Analyses the impact of design, resources and engagement within indoor and outdoor environments to enable learning and development. **(K15)**
Dist.	Critically analyses their choice of intervention strategies to create play, learning and development and social experiences for the child or children, including how these enable enquiry-based active learning. **(K11, K12, S4)**
K11 The importance of play and the theoretical perspectives of play and its impact on a child's learning and development.	
K12 How to stimulate children's creativity and curiosity and why and how this enables enquiry based active learning.	
K15 The importance and impact of design, resources and engagement within indoor and outdoor environments to enable learning and http://www.vqa.org/policies-proceduresdevelopment.	
K16 How planning cycles inform and improve practice and the principles of individual needs-based assessment for effective early intervention for all children responsive to typical and atypical needs and development.	
S4 Support children to engage in a range of learning contexts such as individual, small groups and larger groups as appropriate for their play and support confidence within social experiences.	

S19 Make use of formative and summative assessment, tracking children's progress to plan for future learning possibilities including early interventions based on individual developmental needs.

Overall Grading

The overall grades available for this apprenticeship are fail, pass, merit, or distinction. Each assessment component is graded individually. Once an apprentice has completed all assessment components, the grades are combined as described in the table below to determine an apprentice's overall grade.

Observation with questioning	Professional Discussion	Overall Grade
A fail in any assessment component will result in a fail overall		
Pass	Pass	Pass
Pass	Distinction	Pass
Distinction	Pass	Merit
Distinction	Distinction	Distinction

Resits and Retakes

If an apprentice fails one or more assessment method(s), they are eligible for a resit or a retake. The apprentice's employer needs to agree that a resit or retake is appropriate.

A resit does not need further learning, whereas a retake does. An apprentice should have a supportive action plan to prepare for a resit or a retake.

Resits are typically taken within two months of the fail notification. The timescale for a retake is dependent on how much retraining is required, but they are typically taken within four months of the fail notification.

Failed assessment methods must be resat or retaken within a six-month period from the fail notification, otherwise the entire EPA will need to be resat or retaken in full.

If an apprentice requires a resit or retake, their EPA grade will be capped at a pass, unless Training Qualifications UK determines there are exceptional circumstances.

Resits and retakes are not offered to an apprentice wishing to move from pass to a higher grade.

Appeals

VQA's Appeals Policy, including time frames, can be found here

www.vqa.org

Copyright © 2026 VQA. All rights reserved.

Company number 07827508.

Registered address: Crossgate House, Cross Street, Sale, England, M33 7FT.