

**Curriculum  
Mapping of  
Early Years and  
Early Childhood  
Studies Higher  
Education Qualifications  
Policy and Research Evidence**

**Theodora Papatheodorou, March 2021**

## Table of Contents

.....	1
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	3
<i>Executive summary</i> .....	4
<i>Research Questions</i> .....	4
<i>Sources of information</i> .....	4
<i>Concluding remarks</i> .....	5
<i>References</i> .....	6

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the following people for contributing in various ways to this project:

- Alice Lucas-Clements, Norland Graduate Research Intern, who has conducted initial literature searches, reviewed papers, and drafted paper summaries
- Judith Holby for providing initial key sources that helped to extend the literature searches and for her participation at initial meeting of the project
- Mandy Donaldson, Dr Mallika Kanyal and Dr Eunice Lumsden, the expert advisory group members, for their invaluable insights and comments at the beginning of the project.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Norland Foundation for funding the Graduate Research Intern post.

## Executive summary

This report provides the evidence base for reviewing and revising the current Norland BA (Hons) in Early Years Development and Learning and the Norland diploma for the forthcoming validation of both programmes. It is based on a review of policies and research relevant to early years (EYs) and early childhood studies (ECS) higher education (HE) qualifications. Behind this review was the author's personal interest regarding the development and validation of EYs/ECS HE qualifications. Over the years, as a member of numerous validation panels, mainly for Foundation degrees (Fd) and top-up programmes of study leading to a Bachelor's qualification, the author found that several issues were raised:

- i. There is great variation among EYs/ECS HE programmes of study, despite most of them claim ECS subject benchmark statements being the reference point. The variation across different programmes of study is also reflected in the varied programme and qualification titles.
- i. There is a gap between the work-based learning undertaken at level 5 for Fd and the more rigorous academic nature of top-up programmes of study at level 6 leading to a Bachelor's qualification.
- ii. There is great variation in the practice/work-based elements of these qualifications; placements differ in terms of duration, supervision, mentoring and assessment.

Such programme variability may offer wider employment opportunities for graduates, but the lack of a core curriculum and accepted requirements for practice experience means that employers often do not recognise these qualifications for employment in the EYs sector (Silberfeld and Mitchell, 2018). In this context, it was deemed appropriate to establish what we currently know about the design, content, and delivery of EYs/ECS HE qualifications.

## Research Questions

To build the evidence base, the questions raised were:

1. What are the current policies and requirements for developing EYs/ECS HE programmes of study?
2. What empirical research is available about the design, content, and delivery of EYs/ECS programmes of study?

## Sources of information

These questions were explored by reviewing current policy frameworks that inform the development of EYs/ECS HE programmes of study, including:

- the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA, 2018a), which provides a framework for the development of HE courses, in general
- the QAA characteristics statement of Foundation degree (QAA, 2020)
- the subject benchmark statement which is specific to ECS programmes (QAA, 2019a)
- the early childhood graduate practitioner competencies (QAA, 2019a)
- the early years teachers' standards (NCTL, 2013)
- the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework (DfE, 2017)
- the Norland Code of Professional Responsibilities (Norland, n.d.).

Further sources of information included:

- the Nutbrown review which addresses issues surrounding the EYs workforce, including qualifications (DfE, 2012)
- research studies relevant to EYs and ECS HE qualifications
- research about HE qualifications in relevant subjects.

### **Concluding remarks**

This review has revealed that EYs/ECS HE programmes of study are largely informed by policies regarding the development of HE programmes of study and the ECS subject benchmarking statements. These policies set out expectations about learning outcomes (LOs), teaching and learning strategies, assessment, resources, staffing requirements, programme management, and quality assurance. Professional statutory and non-statutory EYs frameworks, such as the statutory EYFS framework and the non-statutory Development Matters document, and institutional values and vision are also informative regarding the content of EYs/ECS HE programmes of study.

Existing research about EYs/ECS HE programmes, although limited, has provided valuable insights into a range of issues concerning the design and delivery of programmes, including programme LOs, module duration and planning, inclusion, teaching and learning, academic literacy, programme content, assessment, resources, and career progression. Concerning the content of EYs/ECS HE programmes of study, specific key topics have been researched, including professional confidence, the child development continuum, children’s physical and mental health, child–adult interactions and professional love, child protection and safeguarding, special educational needs, transferable skills, and professional values and competencies.

It is evident that existing EYs/ECS HE programmes of study are widely diverse with no core curriculum that clearly defines the distinct nature and role of the EYs workforce. The early years teacher status standards and the ECS subject benchmark statements – the two graduate qualifications – appear to define the role of the EYs workforce in distinctly different terms, with the first focusing on education, while the latter takes a wider interdisciplinary perspective, defining required knowledge, skills, and competencies in the light of young children’s environment. However, by not being mandatory, the ECS subject benchmark statements and the accompanying graduate competencies allow for the design of a wide range of ECS programmes, resulting in the proliferation of relevant programmes with wide and varied curricula.

Despite their varied and broad focus, existing EYs/ECS HE qualifications have both, an academic and professional practice orientation. They are framed within existing policies regarding HE qualifications and are informed by the ECS subject benchmarking statements. Policies concerning the EYs workforce and services for young children and an increased body of research also foreground the EYs/ECS HE programmes of study.

As an academic discipline, EYs/ECS HE programmes of study draw upon and are informed by disciplines such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, neuroscience, history, policy and economics and explore contemporary issues that affect children and EYs practice, e.g. environment and sustainability, and digital childhood/technology. Contested and debatable views and perspectives are also critically explored. As professional practice-oriented qualifications, they provide opportunities for gaining knowledge and competencies required to work directly with children, their families and communities via a curriculum that addresses child development and learning, wellbeing and safeguarding, teaching and learning, mental health, child protection, special educational needs, transferable skills, and professional values and competencies.

These conclusions highlight the importance of having a clear vision of who the EYs professional is – for Norland, this is the nanny, who provides home-based/in-home childcare – to articulate their professional role and responsibilities. This, in turn, will define the knowledge and critical understanding, and the practical, professional and transferable skills required to form the core curriculum of the programme of study, while role-specific curricular options may also be offered (e.g. leadership and management). Consequently, the core and optional curricula will determine the LOs, content, teaching and learning, assessment, resources, support required, and the monitoring and evaluation of the programme of study. It is crucial that extant research and current policies inform the design of programmes and qualifications in order to establish their currency and relevance to the sector, as well as their comparability and consistency in the light of the role of the EYs workforce.

## References

DfE (2012) *Foundations for Quality: The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nutbrown-review-foundations-for-quality> (accessed 5 March 2021).

DfE (2017) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage: Setting the Standards for Learning, Development and Care for Children from Birth to Five*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/596629/EYFS\\_STATUTORY\\_FRAMEWORK\\_2017.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596629/EYFS_STATUTORY_FRAMEWORK_2017.pdf) (accessed 4 March 2021).

NCTL (2013) *Teachers' Standards (Early Years)*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/211646/Early\\_Years\\_Teachers\\_Standards.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211646/Early_Years_Teachers_Standards.pdf) (accessed 5 March 2021).

Norland College (n.d.) *Norland Code of Professional Responsibilities*, Bath: Norland.

QAA (2018a) *The revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education*. Available at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code> (accessed 5 March 2021).

QAA (2019a) *Subject Benchmark Statement: Early Childhood Studies*. Available at: [https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-early-childhood-studies.pdf?sfvrsn=7e35c881\\_14](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-early-childhood-studies.pdf?sfvrsn=7e35c881_14) (accessed 4 March 2021).

QAA (2020) *Characteristics Statement of Foundation Degree*. Gloucester: QAA Available at: [https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/foundation-degree-characteristics-statement-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=6fc5ca81\\_10#:~:text=Foundation%20degrees%20sit%20at%20level,the%20European%20Higher%20Education%20Area](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/foundation-degree-characteristics-statement-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=6fc5ca81_10#:~:text=Foundation%20degrees%20sit%20at%20level,the%20European%20Higher%20Education%20Area) (accessed 5 March 2021).

Silberfeld, C. H. and Mitchell, H. (2018) Graduates' perspectives on their Early Childhood Studies programmes and employment opportunities. *Early Years*. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09575146.2018.1490890> (accessed 5 March 2021).