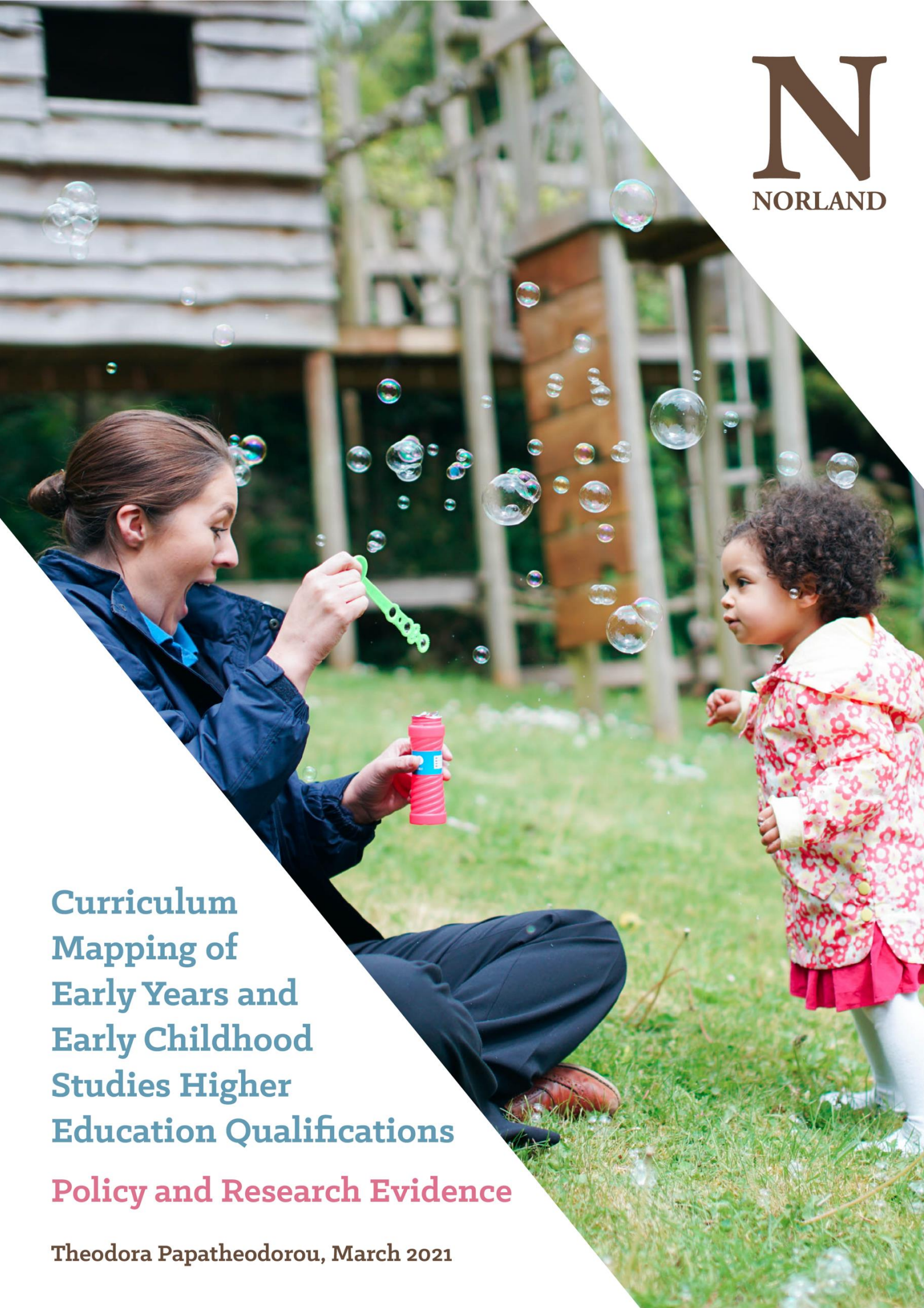

NORLAND

Curriculum Mapping of Early Years and Early Childhood Studies Higher Education Qualifications

Policy and Research Evidence

Theodora Papatheodorou, March 2021

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Abbreviations

DfE	Department for Education
ECS	Early Childhood Studies
ECSDN	Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network
EYE	Early Years Educator
EYs	Early Years
EYs/ECS HE	Early Years/Early Childhood Studies Higher Education
EYTQ	Early Years Teacher Qualification
EYTS	Early Years Teacher Status
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
HE	Higher Education
LOs	Learning Outcomes
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership

Note

Since this report was compiled the Early Childhood studies Benchmark statement has been revised. Significant additions include three-cross-cutting issues, that is, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion; Sustainability; and Employment and Entrepreneurship (QAA 2022)

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 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 relevant research, including:

- the Nutbrown review – an independent review commissioned by the government which addresses the issues surrounding the EYs workforce, including qualifications (DfE, 2012)
- research relevant to EYs and ECS HE qualifications.

Research about HE qualifications in relevant subjects has also been considered.

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, 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.

Introduction

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 higher education qualifications, in general, and 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 and top-up programmes of study at level 6 to achieve a Bachelor's qualification, the author found that several issues were raised:

i. There is great variation among EYs/ECS HE programmes of study in terms of content and practice elements, despite the claim that ECS subject benchmark statements were the reference point. The variation across different programmes of study is also reflected in the varied programme and qualification titles.
ii. There is a gap between the work-based learning undertaken at level 5 and the more rigorous academic nature of top-up programmes of study to achieve a Bachelor's qualification.
iii. There is great variation in the practice-based/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.

The state and status of the EYs workforce

To understand the importance of EYs/ECS HE qualifications, it is important to look at the current state and status of the EYs workforce. Since the late 1990s, successive governments in the UK have been committed to professionalising the EYs workforce. Yet, the professionalisation of the workforce and the requirement for a graduate qualification to work with young children remain aspirational goals with no clear timeline for achieving them. This is in spite of the fact that the attainment of a graduate qualification has been linked with EYs professionals' superior knowledge and specialist training (Eraut, cited in McMillan, 2009). Graduate qualifications result in leading-class early childhood services and quality provision (Roberts-Holmes, cited in Elwick et al., 2018), improve outcomes for children (Sylva et al., 2004; DfE, 2012), and have economic benefits (Heckman, 2000; Belfield and Schwartz, 2006).

In their roles, EYs practitioners act as educators, diagnosticians, and cultural brokers (Boyd, 2013), curricula interpreters (Moss, cited in Osgood et al., 2017), and mediators of interpretative complexity (Degotardi, 2010). As educators, EYs practitioners design, teach and evaluate learning objectives and child outcomes; as diagnosticians, they identify and diagnose, for example, any speech, language, behavioural, emotional and other psychological issues; and as cultural brokers, they teach and negotiate different racial, ethnic, national and diverse identities (Boyd, 2013). As curricula interpreters, EYs practitioners must be able to think critically about wider cultural, ecological, political, social and economic conditions; to question and challenge dominant discourses, power relations and injustices; to co-construct knowledge, values and culture (Moss, in Osgood et al., 2017: 89); and to mediate and communicate the interpretative complexity of the field and sector (Degotardi, 2010). An effective practitioner is the embodiment of expertise and training, reflected in knowledge and understanding of early childhood care and education, a deep sense of respect for the

child, and the recognition that their life is a distinct period of growth and development (Oke et al., 2019).

The complexity of EYs professionals' role and practice has increased, and the EYs profession requires a workforce who are knowledgeable and able to engage in interprofessional practice, take on leadership roles and work directly with children providing care and education; it requires a workforce who are well educated, trained and continuously developing in order to work effectively with such complexity (Payler and Davis, 2017). Given the complex and demanding roles of EYs practitioners and their crucial role in pursuing children's outcomes and, in the long term, building the society's social and economic capital, a highly qualified (and aspirational) workforce is a pertinent requirement. In the UK, this is far from being realised in policy. Payler and Davis (2017: 21) argue that the requirement for a highly trained workforce remains at odds with "increasing political and economic demands for an 'affordable' childcare sector to provide greater capacity at lower costs". Yet, childcare provision is less than affordable for many families.

Despite the challenge of having a qualified workforce at HE level, ECS are now an established academic discipline, offered at graduate and postgraduate level. The first ECS HE degrees were established in 1992 and since then the number of programmes has increased. At the same time, a growing body of research has established ECS as a distinct academic and applied discipline studied at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN) has been instrumental in articulating the academic and applied nature of ECS in the subject benchmark statement (QAA, 2019). Through sustained campaigning, the ECSDN has also been instrumental in reclassifying and upgrading as associate professions some education-focused employment destinations and routes of ECS graduates (ECRC, Roehampton University and ECSDN, 2020), enhancing the status of ECS HE qualifications. However, as has been noted, there seem to be – at least anecdotally – a wide variety of ECS and EYs programmes offered, justifying exploration of current research on the development of these programmes.

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

This report explores these questions by reviewing current policy frameworks that inform ECS and EYs programme development, 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)
- teachers' standards (early years) (NCTL, 2013)
- the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework (DfE, 2017)
- the Norland Code of Professional Responsibilities (Norland, n.d.)

Further sources of information include:

- the Nutbrown review – an independent review commissioned by the government which addresses the issues surrounding the EYs workforce, including qualifications (DfE, 2012)

- research relevant to HE EYs and ECS qualifications.

Research about HE qualifications in relevant subjects has also been considered.

The report is organised under headings that relate to each source of information and concludes with a curriculum mapping matrix. The latter integrates what we know about EYs and ECS HE qualifications to inform the review and revision of the existing Norland degree and diploma.

Policy landscape

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education was established to provide a broad policy framework that outlines the requirements and expectations of every HE course/programme of study offered by HE institutions in the United Kingdom. The framework takes an outcomes-based approach to ensure consistency of programme development among institutions awarding the same qualifications. This approach also aids lecturers/programme developers in designing HE teaching curricula, helps employers and the public to understand the programmes of study offered, and enables students to demonstrate their achievement against the programme learning outcomes (LOs). Consistency between, and regulation of, HE courses ensures standardisation and coherent value behind each qualification (QAA, 2014).

The revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the code) continues to "fulfil its role as the cornerstone for quality in UK higher education, protecting the public and student interest, and championing UK higher education's world-leading reputation for quality" (QAA, 2018a: 1). The code clearly articulates:

- **expectations** for standards and quality which providers should achieve for their awards, and for managing the quality of their provision
- **core practices**, which represent effective ways of working that underpin the delivery of the expectations and result in positive outcomes for students, and **common practices**, which focus on the enhancement of provision
- **advice and guidance** designed to support providers in developing and maintaining effective quality assurance practices by providing a range of possible approaches.

Expectations for standards and quality and for core practices are mandatory elements of the code, whereas common practices (for HE institutions in England) and advice and guidance are non-mandatory elements.

Advice and guidance

Advice and guidance in the code cover a range of themes relating to course design, learning and teaching in HE, assessment, work-based learning, enabling student achievement, student engagement, partnerships, external expertise, recruitment and admission, concerns and complaints, monitoring and evaluation, and research degrees. It is worth noting some of the principles underpinning course design and development, learning and teaching, assessment, and work-based learning, as these are particularly useful for academics involved with the development and delivery of courses/programmes of study.

The course design and development and approval are expected to meet the requirements of academic standards of the relevant national qualifications framework, and the qualification must be awarded in line with sector-recognised standards. Furthermore, the course design is expected to be

guided by internal institutional guidance and external reference points. There needs to be institutional strategic oversight for consistent and transparent approval processes and outcomes; accessible and flexible processes for course design; and staff development and student engagement in course design (QAA, 2018b).

Learning and teaching in HE are expected to provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable their achievement to be reliably assessed. Students must be provided with the support needed to succeed and benefit from their studies. Learning and teaching should be informed by institutional teaching and learning strategy, focusing on student achievement and outcomes. Students should have access to relevant resources, while information made available to them must be clear and easily accessible. Institutions should ensure high-quality learning irrespective of where, how and for whom it is delivered, and there should be a routine evaluation. Finally, students should play an active role in their studies and be enabled to evaluate their learning and engage in an ongoing dialogue with staff (QAA, 2018c).

Assessment methods and criteria are expected to be aligned to LOs and teaching activities. Assessment is approached holistically, and it is inclusive and equitable, reliable, consistent, fair, and valid. It is explicit and transparent, and feedback is purposeful and supports the learning process. Students are supported and prepared for assessment. Furthermore, the assessment should be efficient and manageable and should encourage academic integrity (QAA, 2018d).

Work-based learning is expected to be designed in partnership with employers, students, and other stakeholders and to contain LOs that are relevant to work objectives. The learning achieved is through authentic activity and is supervised in the workplace. It is underpinned by formal agreements between education organisations, employers, and students, and it considers specific issues about the workplace environment and deals with potential issues appropriately. It is expected that there is a meaningful partnership between students, employers, and the educational organisation, so students integrate and apply subject and professional knowledge, skills, and behaviours to enable them to meet course LOs. Parties understand and respect the respective roles, responsibilities and expectations of the education organisation, the employer and the student, and appropriate training and support are provided where required. Work-based learning opportunities are designed, monitored, evaluated, and reviewed in partnership with employers (QAA, 2018e).

Qualification descriptors

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education mandates that programmes should follow the descriptors of the national framework qualifications for different levels of study. Qualification descriptors are generic statements of the intended LOs to be achieved when studying for an HE qualification (QAA, 2014). Typical LOs cover the following areas:

- knowledge and understanding
- cognitive skills
- practical skills
- transferable skills
- professional competences, where relevant (QAA, 2019b).

The qualification descriptors for study at level 6 require that graduate students should demonstrate:

- a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including the acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline
- an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline

- conceptual understanding that enables the student to devise and sustain arguments and/or solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline, and to describe and comment on particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline
- an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge
- the ability to manage their learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline) (QAA, 2014: 26).

The qualification descriptors for study at level 5 state that graduates should demonstrate:

- knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of how these principles have developed
- the ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context
- knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s) relevant to the named award, and the ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study
- an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge (QAA, 2014: 19).

Foundation degrees, offered at level 5 of the framework for higher education qualifications, have distinct characteristics from other qualifications offered at this level of study. Foundation degrees integrated academic and work-based learning through close collaboration between higher education providers and employers. They provide a self-standing qualification and enable further study, including progression to study at level 6 to achieve a Bachelor's with Honours (QAA,2020).

Foundation degree graduates are expected to demonstrate:

- knowledge and critical understanding of the established principles in their field of study, and understanding of the limits of their knowledge
- knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject and the ability to use established techniques to undertake critical analysis of information in order to propose solutions
- the ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems and to apply these in a work context 4
- the ability to apply their knowledge and skills to new situations, including in the workplace effective communication skills in a variety of forms and for a range of audiences. (QAA, 2020)

There is a clear demarcation between descriptors of qualifications at different levels of study, as the keywords in these statements indicate. For example, for level 6 qualifications, keywords include systematic understanding, coherent and detailed knowledge, ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry, devise and sustain arguments, solve problems, comment on current research, appreciation of uncertainty and ambiguity, manage own learning, and use primary sources and scholarly reviews. For level 5 qualifications, the emphasis is placed on knowledge and understanding of well-established principles, application of underlying concepts and principles, knowledge of main methods of enquiry, and understanding limits of own knowledge.

There is also an explicit differentiation between study at level 5 leading to DipHE and study at level 5 leading to a Foundation degree. Graduates of Foundation degrees are expected to 'have the qualities necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and

decision-making.'(QAA:4), while effective communication skills in a variety of forms and for a range of audiences is a particular requirement.

These qualification descriptors form broad and generic statements that need to be adhered to for programme/course development in any discipline and are further amplified and contextualised in subject-specific benchmark statements. The latter provide more detailed information on the intended LOs in particular subjects, describing the 'nature of study' and the 'academic standards' expected of graduates studying a specific subject area (QAA, 2014; QAA, 2019b).

ECS benchmark statements

The ECS subject benchmark statements articulate the defining principles that underpin ECS degrees. They were initially drafted in 2007 and then reviewed and revised in 2014. In 2019 the benchmark statements were updated in light of the revised QAA Quality Code and to include early childhood graduate competencies for practice (QAA, 2019a). The ECS subject benchmark statements are currently under review.

The ECS benchmark statements are underpinned by the principles of:

- the ecology of early childhood from conception, understood as encompassing both time and geographical space, the family and community contexts, and children's and family services
- the interdisciplinary nature of ECS in studying the complexities of family life and children's development from conception onwards, considering the ecology of children's lives
- multiple perspectives, drawing from different disciplines and fields of study, such as history, psychology, education, health, welfare, sociology and social policy, cultural studies, the law, and political and economic perspectives
- theory and its implications for practice to enable students to evaluate and develop appropriate pedagogical approaches to work with babies, young children, families, and communities (QAA, 2019b).

ECS are an established and distinctive academic area of study and research, enabling students to develop understandings of babies, young children, and childhood, from a range of disciplines and professional perspectives. As an academic subject, ECS encompasses a critical understanding of early childhood issues, theories, and research. It views children as active participants, and their rights permeate the subject. Students are introduced to the intricacies and challenges of multi-agency work, and engagement with research and enquiry are a significant part of the studies (QAA, 2019b).

The ECS benchmark statements detail what students must know and do regarding:

- subject knowledge and understanding
- subject-specific and generic skills
- teaching and learning
- assessment.

The ECS subject benchmark statements articulate three levels of attainment standards which students should achieve to be awarded an ECS degree qualification:

1. 'Threshold' standards are the minimum standards that a student should achieve to graduate.
2. 'Typical' standards are those which a student is commonly expected to attain.
3. 'Excellent' standards are the end goal of the highest-attaining graduates.

The three levels of standards are further elaborated into statements, which aim to provide clarity and minimise misinterpretation and ambiguity. For example, "knowledge of some specialised areas

and/or applications" at threshold levels becomes more detailed at the typical level, resulting in "detailed and explicit knowledge of several specialised areas" at the top level (QAA, 2019b, p. 15).

By following these statements when designing curricula, there are strong advantages, which lead to curricula that have a wider focus and differentiation design, while encouraging focus on all subject benchmark statements. The three levels of attainment standards also aid students to know where they sit within the expectations surrounding their field of study, and they are helpful for assessors/markers.

Early childhood graduate practitioner competencies

The link between theory and practice is integral throughout the ECS benchmark statements. However, in the revised ECS benchmark statements in 2014 (QAA, 2014), there were no mandatory practice elements for ECS programmes of study, resulting in employers not recognising ECS degrees as being fit for practice (Silberfeld and Mitchell, 2018). In 2019, the level 6 early childhood graduate practitioner competencies were appended in the ECS benchmark statements to ensure that graduates meeting these competencies are eligible to practise and that they count towards the staff/child ratios in EYs settings (QAA, 2019).

Students pursuing the level 6 early childhood graduate practitioner competencies must demonstrate their competency in the following nine areas:

1. Advocating for young children's rights and participation
2. Promote holistic child development
3. Work directly with young children, families and colleagues to promote health, wellbeing, safety and nurturing care
4. Observe, listen and plan for young children to support their wellbeing, early learning, progression and transitions
5. Safeguarding and child protection
6. Inclusive practice
7. Partnership with parents and caregivers
8. Collaborating with others
9. Professional development

An ECS degree with graduate competencies is now recognised as a qualification for those seeking employment working with young children (DfE, 2021). However, it could be argued that this is a step back, as the competencies are aligned with competencies expected to have been attained by those studying at level 3, i.e., the early years educator qualification.

Early years teachers' standards

The early years teacher status (EYTS) was the qualification which the government introduced as the alternative option to Nutbrown's recommendation of having an early years teacher qualification (EYTQ). In essence, the EYTS replaced early years professional status. The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL, 2013) set out standards across eight areas that EYs teachers must know and apply, namely:

1. Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge all children
2. Promote good progress and outcomes by children
3. Demonstrate good knowledge of early learning and EYFS
4. Plan education and care taking account of the needs of all children
5. Adapt education and care to respond to the strengths and needs of all children
6. Make accurate and productive use of assessment
7. Safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and provide a safe learning environment

8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities

EYs teacher standards placed particular emphasis on statutory assessment, which was required at the end of the foundation stage, especially on the prime areas of the EYFS and the progress review at the age of two/three years.

Although both the EYTS and ECS qualifications address the education and training of those who will be working with children from birth to five years old, there is little consistency concerning their focus, scope, expectations, competencies, and standards. The first is education-oriented and focused, while the latter takes a wider interdisciplinary approach to consider young children's specific environment and milieu.

The early years foundation stage

There is limited research about the content of ECS and EYs HE qualifications (discussed later), but statutory requirements and non-statutory guidelines about children's learning and development form key content of these qualifications (Campbell-Barr et al., 2020). The early years foundation stage (EYFS) is the statutory framework, used in EYs settings with children aged five years old or younger. It outlines the requirements for children's learning and development, assessment, safeguarding and child protection, staff qualifications, and reporting systems and processes (DfE, 2017).

Regarding children's learning and development, the EYFS identifies three prime areas: communication and language; physical development; and personal, social and emotional development. Within the prime areas, specific areas of learning include literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, and expressive arts and design. In addition, the EYFS sets out the guiding principles for planning learning activities, that is, playing and exploring, active learning, creating, and thinking critically.

The implementation of the EYFS is further supported by Development Matters, the non-statutory guidance (DfE, 2020). The Development Matters guidance aims at aiding EYs practitioners to meet the prime and specific areas of learning and development and elaborates key features of effective practice for:

- pursuing the best for every child
- achieving high-quality care
- what children learn – the curriculum
- how children learn – pedagogy
- assessment
- self-regulation and executive function
- partnership with parents
- characteristics of effective teaching and learning.

These areas are commonly included in programme content, although their inclusion is selective and variable across EYs/ECS qualifications (Campbell-Barr et al., 2020).

The Norland Code of Professional Responsibilities

Qualifications offered by Norland are underpinned by the Norland Code of Professional Responsibilities (the code), which contains the professional standards that must be upheld by students, Norland graduates and Newly Qualified Nannies (Norland, n.d.). The code includes four core standards, as detailed below.

Core standard 1: Prioritise children and their families

1. Treat people as individuals
2. Listen to children and their families and respond to their needs, preferences and concerns
3. Act in the best interests of children at all times
4. Respect children's and families' right to privacy and confidentiality

Core standard 2: Practise effectively

5. Always practise in line with the best available evidence
6. Communicate clearly
7. Work cooperatively
8. Share skills, knowledge and experience for the benefit of children and their families
9. Keep clear and accurate records
10. Keep personal qualifications and records up to date

Core standard 3: Preserve safety

11. Recognise and work within the limits of your competence
12. Raise concerns immediately if you believe a child is vulnerable or at risk and needs extra support and protection

Core standard 4: Promote professionalism and trust

13. Uphold the reputation of Norland at all times as a Brand Ambassador
14. Cooperate with all investigations

The values and principles set out in the code are not negotiable or discretionary and are expected to underpin the design and implementation of Norland's programmes of study (Norland, n.d.).

Research evidence

EYs/ECS qualifications are largely driven by policies that articulate how the EYs workforce is to be advanced, and the measures and resources that need to be considered. The limited existing research sheds some light on issues pertinent to EYs/ECS HE programmes of study. In the next section, the Nutbrown recommendations regarding the EYs workforce qualifications will be considered. Studies specific to the design and development of EYs/ECS HE qualifications will be discussed and, where appropriate, other studies from relevant disciplines will be noted.

A two-tier workforce

The Nutbrown review (DFE, 2012), commissioned by the government, is the most prominent and widely cited review of the past decade. It addresses and discusses the complicated issues surrounding EYs education and care, including the qualifications available to EYs practitioners and educators. The review highlighted a major concern about the lack of consistency and standardisation across EYs qualifications, which generated a lack of confidence in the value of qualifications among both employers in the EYs sector and graduates themselves.

The review was a significant milestone in the debate and policy development regarding qualifications for the EYs workforce. However, it was also a missed opportunity to propose a single qualification for the EYs workforce, to articulate the uniqueness of this qualification and to set the goal of requiring a graduate qualification to work with young children. Instead, Nutbrown proposed a set of qualifications – along the familiar routes – to ensure a competent and confident workforce, namely:

1. the early years educator (EYE) for working with children up to the age of three, offered at level 3

2. the early years teacher qualification (EYTQ) for working with young children from three to five years old, offered at the graduate level (the government, in response, reverted to early years teacher status).

By name, if not in essence, both qualifications were anchored in education, signifying the higher status given to education, rather than articulating the uniqueness of an EYs qualification that integrates care and education. This also led to a two-tier qualification system reflecting different statuses (Osgood et al., 2017; Campbell-Barr et al., 2020). The EYE qualification for working with the youngest children and offered at level 3 remains of lower status than the EYTS, which is offered at a graduate level for working with older children. Yet the latter is of lower status than the EYTQ initially proposed by Nutbrown. Interestingly, the ECS degree qualification, despite its academic nature and professional practice orientation, was not considered as a potential qualification for working with young children.

A complex and demanding role

It is beyond the scope of this review to discuss the impact of the Nutbrown review on the proliferation of qualifications and the challenges in attracting the best and most confident candidates for study and for employment in the sector (for this, see Campbell-Barr et al., 2020; Osgood at al., 2017). But it is of significance to consider some of the recommendations that concern the development of EYs qualifications. While the review may not have been conducted to specify the content of EYs programmes, recommendations were put forward concerning what the EYs workforce needs to know. Some of the areas highlighted were:

- understanding child development – age range 0–7 years old
- understanding the way people learn – pedagogical process and how it is applied
- provide warmth and love
- understanding language development
- understanding special educational needs
- understanding the role of play
- safeguarding and protection (health, safety, basic first aid, legal framework)
- inclusion and diversity
- observation and assessment
- experiencing practice in a variety of settings
- how to work effectively with families.

Some further recommendations included:

- Students should attend placements, where they observe and work alongside highly qualified practitioners; placements should take place in “outstanding” or “good” settings and be considered on the ability of settings to support students.
- Tutors/lecturers should hold qualifications at a more advanced level than the qualification they teach, and undertake continuing professional development.
- There should be transparency about the qualification outcomes, with institutions providing evidence that they were providing learning and meeting the expectations.
- There should be the following entry requirements – GCSE maths and English at grade C (DfE, 2012).

These recommendations echo some of the key elements of the EYFS framework, Development Matters and the ECS benchmark statements concerning subject knowledge and understanding, subject-specific and generic skills, teaching and learning, and assessment.

Design and development of EYs/ECS HE qualifications

With regard to EYs/ECS HE programmes of study, there is a lack of research that investigates the design of, and standardisation and parity among, qualifications offered by different institutions, as well as their quality. However, the limited research available sheds some light on issues pertinent to programme design and delivery.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes (LOs) outline what the learner can expect to have gained in terms of knowledge or skills by the conclusion of the course/qualification (QAA, 2014). By linking the LOs to specific levels of teaching and qualifications, there are advantages in terms of the ability to distinguish between the skills acquired by those holding degrees and those with diplomas (Girot, 1999). Furthermore, by using novel methods of teaching that are linked to LOs that are transparently defined, there are positive effects on student success rates and depth of learning (Nayak, 2018, in the abstract). In general, when an institution designs its courses around LOs, it can have a constructive effect on the students' performance and the wider learning environment (Armellini and Aiyegbayo, in DiCarlo and Cooper, 2014).

There is no EYs/ECS-specific research around LOs, but drawing from research conducted in other fields of study, we can gain some insights into the complexity of and the issues surrounding designing curricula around LOs. McGowan (2019), for example, redesigned a curriculum (on a nursing qualification), relocating LOs originally positioned in the final year to the first year of study, and sought the opinions of the students. It was found that the demands of LOs between different levels of study were very similar, with student confidence in attaining them being an important factor. McGowan (2019) argued that while the same LO can be applied to many levels of study, consideration needs to be given so that lower levels of study have a lower LO demand on students than the LOs at a higher level of study. Thus, clarity in articulating LOs is particularly crucial for aiding student performance.

Inclusion

The importance of inclusion when designing HE curricula has been investigated (although not in the context of EYs/ECS qualifications), suggesting that focusing on the needs of a particular group of students benefits all students (Johnson, cited in The Higher Education Academy, 2011). Key factors in improving inclusivity include an opportunity for collaboration, flexibility, equitable access to resources and support (The Higher Education Academy 2011), and opportunities for students to discuss their professional reflections on designated tasks (Bromley, cited in The Higher Education Academy, 2011). It is argued that being reflective in a supported environment can lead to more positive outcomes for students (Bromley, cited in The Higher Education Academy, 2011).

EYs/ECS HE programme/course curriculum content

Although limited, the research on ECS and EYs HE qualifications offers some insights into the issues pertinent to the content and focus of these programmes, including professional confidence, skill development and leadership, the child development continuum, practitioner–child interactions and professional love, and placements – which will be discussed next.

Broad and varied

In their recent systematic literature review, Campbell-Barr and colleagues (2020) reported that there is great variation in the content of EYs programmes with no core curriculum. Their analysis of 320 degrees revealed the range of topics covered, including professional practice and reflections, research, pedagogy (teaching and learning), inclusion, social inequality, social justice, policy, health and wellbeing, sociology, safeguarding, international perspectives, working with families, leadership,

play, children's rights, critical/contesting views, psychology, philosophy, creativity, technology (digital childhood), history, and environment and sustainability. Professional practice and reflection were listed as the top topics (mentioned 247 times), while sustainability was the least frequently mentioned (55 times). Some topics were unexpectedly mentioned less frequently – for example, play was mentioned only 100 times, children's rights 85 times and psychology 71 times. The researchers commented that this was due to the way these topics were associated with others. For example, play was linked with pedagogy, psychology with child development, and children's rights with history, philosophy and safeguarding.

It is interesting to note that the curriculum content of these degrees reflects:

- the multidisciplinary nature of EYs, informed by disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, history and policy
- professional practice-focused topics for working directly with children and families/leading provision, e.g. play, pedagogy, safeguarding, inclusion, health and well-being, leadership
- contemporary issues such as environment and sustainability, technology (digital childhoods) and international perspectives
- Critical perspectives/contesting views, including social inequality, social justice

The lack of a common curriculum may not clearly define the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the EYs/ECS field of study and the professional role of the EYs workforce, but equally it can be argued that the varied and broad curricula illustrate the complex and diverse nature of EYs/ECS as a field of study and indicate the wide range of competencies and the demanding role of the EYs workforce. EYs professionals are expected to:

- be equipped with academic knowledge and critical understanding of a wide range of key issues surrounding children, their families and communities
- be acutely aware of a wide range of contemporary issues and contested and debatable perspectives and the way may influence practice
- be skilful and competent practitioners

Children's learning and development and the EYs curriculum

Linked with the key topics covered in EYs/ECS degrees is the literature review which Rose and Gilbert (2017) conducted about children's learning and development. Their review focused on domains and areas of learning articulated in the four UK curricula (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) for EYs. They found eight overarching themes, each consisting of several sub-topics, as follows:

1. Personal, social and emotional development, with further topics addressing relationships; social and emotional development/competencies; social context of learning; moral development; social regulations; behaviour; spiritual development
2. Communication, language and literacy, including dialogic encounters; developing literacy; bilingual learners and culture
3. Mathematics, including emphasis on numbers; mathematical graphics; maths and culture
4. Expressive arts and design, including arts-based learning; possibility thinking and creativity; drawing; musicality; performing arts/creativity
5. Physical development, including neurodevelopment; movement play; physical literacy
6. Outdoors learning, including health and wellbeing; resilience benefits; forest schools; risky play
7. Scientific enquiry/understanding the world, including neuroscientific evidence; metacognition; executive functioning
8. Learning and development in a digital world, including digital literacies, using technology

The researchers acknowledged tensions and unresolved ongoing debates about 'schoolification' of the EYs curriculum and normative assumptions about development, cultural diversity and the role of adults. They acknowledged that the literature review has 'restated traditional insights' about, for example, the significance of active engagement and the sociocultural context, the nurturing of relationships, and the development of self-regulatory skills to foster their own learning. But they also reported that some areas have been looked at or explored from different lenses and perspectives – for example, considering new ways of understanding developmental delay through research that focuses on neurophysiological development; giving greater priority to movement, physical play and outdoor learning; and exploring more widely children's spirituality, musicality and arts-based learning, utilisation of resources, and the rapid advance of technology. Evidence emerging from the neurosciences is increasingly used to contest received professional knowledge.

This literature review reflects some of the established and emerging topics that are included in EYs/ECS degrees' curricula, shown in Campbell-Barr and colleagues' review (2020). The extant research in these areas substantiates both the academic and professional practice underpinning these degrees, despite their broad and varied focuses.

The child development continuum

Concerning child development, Rix and Parry (2014) have explored the language used in the EYFS and discussed the failure of the framework to identify typical and atypical development forming part of a spectrum. The researchers argued that the framework remained affixed to discussing the typical separately from atypical development, with the latter focusing on needs. And they drew attention to Evangelou's observation that "development proceeds in a web of multiple strands, with different children following different pathways" (in Rix and Parry, 2014: 3). Similarly, by drawing from research on neurophysiological development, Rose and Gilbert (2017) have indicated that developmental delay should be understood in different ways.

Practitioner–child interactions and professional love

The value of practitioner–child interactions in EYs/ECS degrees or diplomas has also been highlighted by Degotardi (2010). Related to this is Page's (2017) concept of 'professional love', which refers to a model of forming authentic attachments between children and caregivers, while the caregiver is decentred from the relationship. Page explored the opinions of EYs non-familial caregivers who discussed their professional attachments with children under their care and highlighted the confusion and uncertainty that exist around the love that should be exhibited from a professional position. Page concluded that clearer guidance is required to remove uncertainty in practitioners. The latter point is of particular relevance in the light of the rise in child sexual abuse reports and in the context of previous research that has shown that individuals' interpretations of the policies surrounding the level of intimacy have been varied (Page and Elfer, cited in Page, 2017). The ideas about professional love are an area that should be explored further to reduce student anxiety and concerns about this issue, and to help graduates to perform their jobs to a higher quality.

Professional confidence

Examining the views of EYs graduates and EYs students in Northern Ireland, McMillan (2009) reported a consensus about the suitability of the course and their training in terms of acquiring professional confidence for future employment. Children's physical and mental health needs and students' ability to create and establish a safe surrounding were highlighted. The graduates felt ill-prepared to work with special educational needs children, to diagnose children who exhibited developmental delays and to lead parent meetings and implement EYs policies. McMillan's study highlights the importance of considering opinions and contributions from students when discussing the content of EYs/ECS HE courses.

Similarly, Bishop et al. (2002) reported that trainees who had completed a BA primary qualified teacher status qualification found their learning – specifically, their learning related to child protection – beneficial, but revealed feelings of anxiety when forming a decision about child abuse issues, especially when working with potential abusers and during inter-agency EYs work. These findings further reinforce the importance of having student input in curriculum design and content in order to produce competent graduates who are well prepared to integrate into the workforce.

Professional values – transferable skills

Gasper (2014) highlights that strong commitment, willingness, openness, awareness of one's own and others' skills, and being valued by the EYs workforce are essential and fundamental attributes to succeed in one's role. These attributes are relevant and applicable to a variety of professions and thus represent some of the transferable skills to be pursued to open access to a wide range of diverse career opportunities for EYs graduates both within and outside the EYs sector.

Work-based placements

The Nutbrown (2012) review and the ECS benchmark statements have emphasised the significance of undertaking a good-quality placement to link theory and practice. Yet, as Campbell-Barr and colleagues (2020) have reported, work-placement arrangements are variable and fragmented, ranging from just encouraging students to gain work experience to clearly stipulating requirements (e.g., number of hours per term/year/duration of the degree; having a mentor; assessment). Research focusing on the value of placements and practical experience is limited. However, relevant studies have shown that placement experience, despite being hard for students to adjust to, results in superior knowledge, including a greater understanding of the EYs setting and learning curricula (Truelove, 2016). Placements also have large advantages when employed alongside taught curriculum modules (Twigg and Yates, 2019). Silberfeld and Mitchell (2018) have reported that placements form strong indicators of graduate satisfaction with the qualification.

Teaching/learning strategies

One key theme that emerges from the current research is that of teaching and learning strategy recommendations. Bass and Good (2004), discussing education in general, have highlighted the importance of teachers acting as facilitators, especially if it is to change and advance the vision for the future of the education system. They discussed and argued for Craft's definition and the difference between the concepts 'educare', where students are taught to pass through the education system, and 'educere', where the goal is for students to be efficiently prepared for unknown situations (Craft, in Bass and Good, 2004).

The concept of 'educere' has been surrounded by controversy (Parson, cited in Bass and Good, 2004), but several researchers have expressed the importance of obtaining equilibrium between 'educare' and 'educere' for both academic and future economic advantages (Bass, in Bass and Good, 2004; Deming, in Bass and Good, 2004). Bass and Good's (2004) research suggests that teaching and learning strategies are on the spectrum of 'educare' and 'educere', with an equilibrium between the two being the optimal solution. This is an interesting idea to be considered when designing curricula, and especially when considering the teaching strategies involved.

Papatheodorou and colleagues explored students' experiences and views about teaching and learning in ECS HE programmes in a series of studies (Papatheodorou, 2005 and 2010; Papatheodorou et al., 2007; Luff et al., 2006; Bradwell et al., 2005). The initial study, *The Portfolio of Evidence,* was conducted among first-year students (level 4) and focused on a module designed to address students' learning as they enter HE (Papatheodorou, 2005). The module aimed at helping

students to become aware of their learning through documentation of, and reflection on, the work they undertook and the evidence which they needed to collect to demonstrate their learning. Students were introduced to reflection, different modes of learning (e.g., individual and group work, investigations, and timed problem-solving case studies) and different modes of assessment (group visual presentations, essay writing, case studies) which undergraduates frequently encounter during their study, while the assessment was staggered to offer opportunities for formative feedback. The module was designed on the principles of constructivism and emphasised the process of knowledge construction that has personal relevance and meaning located in students' own educational and cultural experience and milieu (Papatheodorou, 2005; 2010). Exploring students' experiences and views about the module delivery, several issues emerged concerning their lack of confidence in engaging with learning; their previous learning experience shaping their expectation about learning in HE; the impact of unfamiliar terminology in engaging with their learning; the impact of group work on professional, transferable skills and personal growth; and the challenges of engaging in meaningful reflection.

Papatheodorou (2005) recommended that tutors should clarify academic terminology and language they use early on, when students enter HE study, to convey clear messages and expectations. Communication requires a shared understanding of the meaning of the academic terminology and discourse used. Tutors should also think how reflection is introduced, as it is not something that every individual can meaningfully engage in. Students should be systematically facilitated and supported to enhance reflection skills. Furthermore, tutors should offer learning support in small and frequent doses. Autonomous and independent learning – a goal of HE learning – should not be assumed, but it should be supported and facilitated systematically to gradually lead to students' confidence in engaging with independent learning.

Concerning group work, Papatheodorou and colleagues reported that students consider it as being instrumental in developing transferable professional and personal skills like collaboration, communication and negotiation, and in gaining confidence by being valued and appreciated for their ideas and contribution to group work (Papatheodorou, 2005 and 2010; Papatheodorou et al., 2007). It was however noted that for group work to bring about such outcomes, it requires careful planning and organisation of small groups, regularly altering membership composition to avoid the dominance of certain members, and planning well-defined activities that link explicitly to LOs and module content (Papatheodorou, 2005 and 2010).

Assessment

Assessing knowledge and skills is a fundamental element of many qualifications, as it demonstrates that learning has occurred. When considering assessments, all students benefit from effective methods of assessment (Robles and Braathen, cited in DiCarlo and Cooper, 2014) and "transparent and clear assessment criteria" (The Higher Education Academy, 2011: 5). Referring to qualified teacher status (QTS) programmes of study, Martin and Cloke (2000) observed that it is crucial for the process and instrument(s) of assessment to explicitly reflect the aims of a course of study and correspond to the purpose of a specific assessment. Thus, assessments must follow certain principles, ensuring the validity and reliability of the assessment tools within a particular context, so that LOs determine assessment rather than vice versa (Martin and Cloke, 2000). While these observations refer to QTS programmes of study, they could also be extended to cover HE courses in general, and to ECS, too.

Papatheodorou (2005) recommended that institutions should consider whether their assessment policy aligns with the underlying philosophy of learning and teaching adopted in their programmes of study. Current assessment policies and practices tend to be in line with a knowledge transmission model rather than knowledge creation and meaning making. Assessment criteria assume the

reproduction of extant knowledge (aligned with positivism) rather than students' ability to construct and reconstruct knowledge and give personal meaning to their learning and subsequent practice (assumed on constructivism). The incongruity between adopted teaching and learning philosophies and assessment practices can have a detrimental effect on student confidence in engaging with learning and becoming autonomous learners.

Concerning ECS qualifications, the subject benchmark statements emphasise the use of a variety of different techniques and tools to assess the broad skills students require to enter the workforce (QAA, 2019a). Having different and appropriate assessment methods that reflect real-life issues and situations and which EYs practitioners will experience in their career provides them with the opportunity to successfully demonstrate the wide range of learning and skills that would not otherwise be effectively assessed by using the same approach. The notion that not all assessment tools are appropriate for every assessment should be carefully considered when determining methods of assessment that are appropriate to the specific LOs of a course. The use of a variety of appropriate methods to assess LOs is particularly pertinent to the assessment of transferable skills. Papatheodorou et al. (2007) have reported that ECS students perceive their learning as being wider and broader than the module content, and this includes personal and professional transferable skills and growth. Such skills were particularly enhanced by group work (Papatheodorou, 2005).

Assessment of group work

The benefits and disadvantages of group assessments compared with independent individual work have been explored by Plastow and colleagues in relation to undergraduates during their first and last years of study on an Occupational Therapist programme (Plastow et al., 2010). Students completed independent and group assessments that were allocated different weighting ratios (dependent on their year of study) to explore whether using both methods together was a suitable measure of assessment. The researchers concluded that the group mark was not in line with a student's academic skills, displayed in independent assessment. A significant number of students passed modules despite having failed the independently completed exams. Plastow and colleagues cited Strauss and Alice's observation that group work grade disparity is a major issue in the first year of study, as students' skills are not advanced enough to retain their individualism in the context of learning while being part of a group (Strauss and Alice, cited in Plastow et al., 2010).

Plastow and colleagues (2010) acknowledged that the assessment of group work, especially when contributing to degree classification, is surrounded by controversy, but they highlighted that one strength is that lecturers/tutors can examine and assess non-academic abilities in a graded way. For this, they recommend that group work should be used with final-year students. However, to overcome some of the issues raised, they recommend that group work:

- has an appropriate ratio of independent versus collaborative work
- examines and assesses non-academic skills
- counts towards the module mark
- occurs at the later stages of the degree, when students have established individual learner identity while being part of a group.

Resources

The type of resources used and the availability of resources is a factor that needs to be considered when designing a curriculum in order to create a cohesive relationship between the LOs, course content, resource availability/accessibility and the students' learning. However, the cost of course texts is increasingly becoming an unfeasible option for a growing number of students, and thus more free online sources of information are increasingly used (Buczynski, 2007). However, the use of such sources has its challenges. Cmon and Lippold (cited in Griffiths and Brophy, 2005) reported that

students give academic research and unsubstantiated content similar weightings in terms of status. This is a major limitation of using online sources when their academic credence, validity and reliability are not verified. It is suggested that students should be made aware of misconceptions surrounding resource quality and become familiar with search tools in order to locate appropriate sources to aid their subject knowledge (Griffiths and Brophy, 2005).

Resource availability is an issue that students often raise regarding their studies and especially when it comes to assessment. In their HERON project, Bradwell and colleagues (2005) introduced carefully selected limited key reading which was simultaneously available online to all students on a specific year-two module (level 5). The study revealed that students who used the recommended key reading expanded their reading further by doing independent searches. This finding highlights the importance of carefully selected and well-targeted key reading that matches module LOs and content and enables students to grasp key ideas and consequently undertake further searches and reading.

Student academic literacy

Although students often report the availability of learning resources as a factor that impacts their learning, Luff and colleagues (2005) found that this is the least important step to academic literacy. Their research project was designed to engage students in reading relevant academic texts, to increase their confidence in using these texts in critical and analytical writing, and to encourage them to reflect on their learning processes. The findings revealed that the main challenge students faced was becoming critical and analytical in reading and expressing this critical analysis through writing. As noted by Papatheodorou (2005), the researchers highlighted the tensions between the formal requirements for academic literacy, as prescribed by university regulations and module assessment criteria with a focus on knowledge transmission, and how students are encouraged and taught to express their meaning making. The researchers argued that subject teaching should be planned to raise students' awareness of potential clashes and inconsistencies they may encounter during their studies and facilitate them to negotiate such conflicts to reach personal meaning. They point out that it is the disequilibrium encountered that provides motivation for knowledge creation and promotes the development of new understandings.

Module duration and delivery

There is little research about the structure, organisation and design of EYs/ECS HE programmes. Variety in practical work, theory, case studies and observations is highly valued. Indeed, the integration of these elements into the NNEB diploma in Nursery Nursing (level 3) has made it the top qualification, with the Norland NNEB being seen as the pinnacle of the qualification (Elwick et al., 2018).

Papatheodorou and colleagues (2007) explored the impact of module duration, planning and delivery, assessment methods, and the process of documentation on students' learning experience and attainment. They reported that year-long and high-credit modules allow students time for exploration, enquiry and in-depth study and enable them to engage with the learning process and gradually acquire a holistic view of their field of study. A 12-week module often felt pressurised, and the anxiety about completing the module and assessment meant that there was limited time for reflection and growth. Year-long modules, however, require systematic and proactively planned support to keep students engaged with the module and enable them to make links between their learning and module content. Staggered summative assessment that embeds regular formative assessment, self-assessment and peer review throughout year-long modules is crucial to foster students' confidence in meeting assessment criteria via an active process.

The EYs/ECS student demographic

Campbell-Barr et al.'s analysis (2020) of the EYs student population and demographic characteristics has revealed that almost 50% of students were over 30 years and entering study with a non-traditional educational background (e.g., vocational level 3 qualification or level 4/5 qualifications). Over 40% were studying part-time and nearly 30% were pursuing a foundation degree. Despite an EYs qualification being seen as a route to teacher training, only 5% of graduates entered these courses. Campbell-Barr et al. (2020) commented that EYs students entering HE with diverse qualifications, representing a wide age range and studying part-time fulfil universities' widening participation agenda. However, such a diverse student population requires attention to be given to teaching and learning strategies and the support offered. As the student demographic has shifted, it is crucial to consider the pedagogies adopted in EYs programmes of study (Papatheodorou, 2010) to include methods that emulate students' future practice with young children and enable reflection and decision making about their learning (Luff et al., 2006). Brown Wright (2011) has also reported that changing learning environments and teaching to be student-centred/appropriate results in students welcoming these changes, and teachers consider themselves successful in enabling student success, while achieving their course objectives.

Career path/progression

One major issue faced by the EYs sector is the high turnover rates of staff. In 2016, a survey conducted by the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) reported that nearly one in five people left the workforce (18% of the workforce, an increase of nearly 1.3% from the previous year) (NDNA, 2016). The reasons behind this escalating turnover included the lack of financial security/low wages and the scarcity of career progression once qualified and employed in the EYs sector (NDNA, 2016). Similarly, Silberfeld and Mitchell (2018), who explored the views of graduates about ECS degrees, reported that while the graduates rated their ECS degree highly favourably, they voiced concerns that employers and careers advisers failed to fully comprehend the value of their degree. Nearly 20% of the participants stated that, if they could, they would alter their degree choice to choose to teach instead, due to teaching offering more superior employment opportunities.

This similarity in the percentages reported by these two studies suggests that EYs students, graduates and practitioners may think of or seek to move into another sector or change career early on in their studies and careers. If this is the case, then more career support and information need to be made available to students both while they are still training and upon graduating to enable them to make fully informed choices about their career pathways.

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 subject-specific benchmarking. These policies set out expectations about LOs, teaching and learning strategies, assessment, resources, staffing requirements, programme management, and quality assurance. Statutory and non-statutory EYs frameworks, such as the EYFS framework and Development Matters, and institutional values and vision are also informative concerning 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 programmes, 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, special educational needs, transferable skills, and professional values and competencies.

It is evident that existing EYs/ECS HE programmes of study appear to be widely diverse, with no core curriculum that clearly defines the distinct nature and role of the EYs workforce. The EYTS standards and the ECS 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 in defining required knowledge, skills and competencies. However, by not being mandatory, the ECS 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 the varied and broad focus of the existing EYs/ECS HE qualifications, it is evident that these have both an academic and professional practice orientation. They are designed and framed with existing policies regarding HE qualifications and informed by the subject benchmarking statements. Policies concerning the EYs workforce and EYs services for young children and an increased body of research also foreground the EYs/ECS HE education qualifications (see, figure 1).

As an academic discipline, EYs/ECS HE qualifications 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, debatable views and perspectives are also critically explored. As a professional practice-oriented qualification provide opportunities for gaining knowledge and competencies required to work directly with children, their families and communities (e.g., child development and learning, wellbeing and safeguarding, teaching and learning, mental health, child protection, special educational needs, transferable skills, and professional values and competencies)

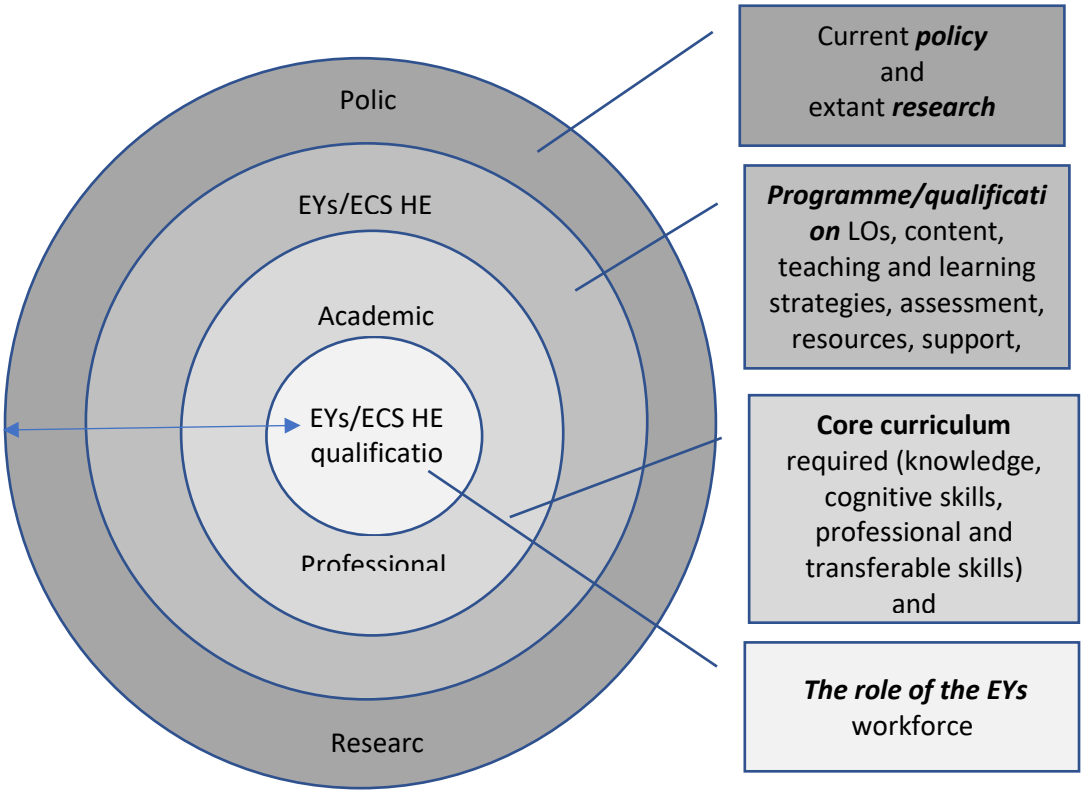

Figure 1: A framework for programme/qualification design

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 – and articulating their professional role and responsibilities. This, in turn, will define the knowledge and critical understanding of key issues concerning EYs and the practical, professional and transferable skills that are required to form the core curriculum of the programme/qualification; role-specific curricular options may also be offered. 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/qualification. It is crucial that extant research informs the design of EYs/ECS HE qualifications, while policy is the reference point for establishing the comparability, consistency and currency of these qualifications.

Returning to the argument that it is important to have a highly qualified workforce, it is crucial that EYs/ECS HE programmes of study have both an academic and a professional practice focus, which is reflected in the curriculum content, and that programme design considers relevant policies. The dynamic and interactional process among these elements of EYs/ECS HE programmes is illustrated in figure 1, below. Table 1 summarises what is already known about EYs/ECS qualifications, statutory and non-statutory policy requirements, and relevant research.

Table 1. Curriculum mapping framework

The EYs professional – qualifications and status		
Who is the EYs professional?	**Role complexity and demand** • Educators – design, teach and evaluate learning objectives and child outcomes • Early diagnosticians – identify (and diagnose) any speech, language, behavioural, emotional and psychological issues • Cultural brokers – teach and negotiate different racial, ethnic, national and diverse identities • Curricula and complexity interpreters **Attributes and dispositions:** • Strong commitment • Willingness • Openness • Awareness of own and others' skills • Dedicated • Respect for the child • Relationships with parents • Organised • Teamwork • Collaboration • Flexibility	Boyd, 2013 Moss, in Osgood et al., 2017 Degotardi, 2010 Gasper, 2014 Oke et al., 2019
What are the distinct elements of HE qualifications?	They offer: • Superior knowledge • Specialist training	Eraut, in McMillan, 2009
Status of EYs/ECS HE qualifications	• Qualifications with practical element stronger for employment • ECS degrees highly rated by graduates • Employers fail to understand the value of ECS degrees	NDNA, 2016 Silberfeld and Mitchell, 2018

HE qualifications policy framework		
Areas of knowledge and skills required	• Knowledge and understanding • Cognitive skills • Practical skills • Transferable skills • Professional competencies, where relevant	QAA, 2014
Descriptors of different levels of study	**Level 6 BA (Hons)** – keywords in LOs descriptors • Systematic understanding • Coherent and detailed knowledge • Ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry • Devise and sustain arguments • Solve problems • Comment on current research • Appreciation of uncertainty and ambiguity • Manage own learning • Use primary sources and scholarly reviews	QAA, 2014 QAA, 2020
	Level 5 (DipHE) – keywords in LOs descriptors: • Knowledge and understanding of well-established principles • Application of underlying concepts and principles • Knowledge of main methods of enquiry • Understanding limits of own knowledge	
	Level 5 (Fd) - Keywords in LOs descriptors • Knowledge and critical understanding of the established principles • Understanding of the limits of their knowledge • Knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject • Undertake critical analysis of information to propose solutions • Ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems and to apply these in a work context • Ability to apply their knowledge and skills to new situations, • Effective communication skills in a variety of forms and for a range of audiences	

ECS benchmark statements (non-mandatory)		
ECS benchmark statements	Subject-specific areas of study • The ecology of early childhood • The interdisciplinary nature of ECS • Multiple perspectives, drawing from different fields of study • Theory and its implications for practice	QAA, 2019b
	Standards • Basic/threshold – knowledge of some specialist areas and/or applications • Typical – those typically expected to be attained by students • Excellent – detailed knowledge of several specialist areas	
	Graduate competencies: • Advocating for young children's rights and participation • Promote holistic child development • Work directly with young children, families and colleagues to promote health, wellbeing, safety and nurturing care • Observe, listen and plan for young children to support their wellbeing, early learning, progression and transitions • Safeguarding and child protection • Inclusive practice • Partnership with parents and caregivers • Collaborating with others • Professional development	
EYTS standards	• Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge all children • Promote good progress and outcomes by children • Demonstrate good knowledge of early learning and EYFS • Plan education and care taking account of the needs of all children • Adapt education and care to respond to the strengths and needs of all children • Make accurate and productive use of assessment • Safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and provide a safe learning environment • Fulfil wider professional responsibilities	NCLT, 2013

Institutional (Norland) code of practice (mandatory for Norland programmes of study)		
Norland Code of Professional Responsibilities	*Prioritise children and their families – core standard 1* • Treat people as individuals • Listen to children and their families and respond to their needs, preferences and concerns • Act in the best interests of children at all times • Respect children's and families' right to privacy and confidentiality *Practise effectively – core standard 2* • Always practise in line with the best available evidence • Communicate clearly • Work cooperatively • Share skills, knowledge and experience for the benefit of children and their families • Keep clear and accurate records • Keep personal qualifications and records up to date *Preserve safety – core standard 3* • Recognise and work within the limits of your competence • Raise concerns immediately if you believe a child is vulnerable or at risk and needs extra support and protection *Promote professionalism and trust – core standard 4* • Uphold the reputation of Norland at all times as a Brand Ambassador • Cooperate with all investigations	Norland, n.d. *(to be cross-referenced with ECS benchmark statements and EYs/ECS HE qualifications curriculum content)*
EYs/ECS programmes of study		
EYs training – quality issues	• Mutual inclusivity of learning/education and care • Integration of theory and practice • Variety of teaching and learning methods • Expertise and specialist training • Entry requirements for training/study • Teaching staff qualifications higher than the level taught • Evidence by the institution of meeting learning expectations/outcomes • Evidence by the institution of transparency of qualification outcomes	DfE, 2012 (Nutbrown review) Oke et al., 2019

	• Input and regulation by governing bodies	
EYs/ECS HE qualifications – curriculum content		
Academic – interdisciplinary focus	Drawing from: • Philosophy • Psychology • Sociology • History • Politics • Economics • Law	Campbell-Barr et al., 2020
Professional knowledge and competencies	**Child development** • Explored in a continuum of typical and atypical development • Potential/competence – focused vs need-focused • New ways of understanding developmental delay through neurodevelopmental research • Children's physical and mental health and needs	Rix and Parry, 2014
	Children's learning and development – including reference to EYs curricula (e.g., EYFS) <u>*How children learn – EYs pedagogy*</u> <u>*What children learn – EYs curricula prime areas of learning*</u> • Personal, social and emotional development addressing relationships; social and emotional development/competencies; social context of learning; moral development; social regulations; behaviour; spiritual development • Communication, language and literacy, including dialogic encounters; developing literacy; bilingual learners and culture • Physical development, including neurodevelopment; movement play; physical literacy <u>*Specific areas of learning*</u> • Mathematics, including emphasis on numbers; mathematical graphics; maths and culture • Literacy, including current debates	Campbell-Barr et al., 2020 Rose and Gilbert, 2017 DfE, 2012; 2017; 2020 Page, 2017 Higher Education Academy, 2011 McMillan, 2009 Degotardi, 2010

	• Scientific enquiry/understanding the world, including neuroscientific evidence; metacognition; executive functioning • Expressive arts and design, including arts-based learning; possibility thinking and creativity; drawing; musicality; performing arts/creativity • Outdoors learning, including health and wellbeing; resilience benefits; forest schools; risky play • Learning and development in a digital world, including digital literacies, using technology *Characteristics of effective teaching and learning – Planning learning activities* • Playing and exploring • Active learning • Creating and thinking critically *Safeguarding and child protection – Strengthening confidence* • Dealing with child sexual abuse • Authentic attachment • Professional love • Practitioner–child interactions • Creating safe environments for children *Diversity, equity and inclusion* • Diverse cultures • Special educational needs • Diagnosis of developmental needs • Equity and inclusion *Partnership with parents* • Understanding effective practice • Building relationships with parents • Leading meetings with parents *Implementing policy, e.g.* • Reporting systems and processes • Staff qualifications *Achieving high-quality care*	

	• Characteristics of high-quality childcare • Contesting views of quality	
Work-based learning/ placements	• Designed in partnership with employers, students and other stakeholders • Parties understand and respect their respective roles, responsibilities and expectations • Underpinned by formal agreements between education organisations, employers and students • Consider specific issues about the workplace environment and deal with potential issues appropriately • Appropriate training and support are provided where required • Meaningful partnership, so students integrate and apply subject and professional knowledge, skills and behaviours to enable them to meet course LOs • Learning opportunities are designed, monitored, evaluated and reviewed in partnership with employers • LOs that are relevant to work objectives • Learning achieved is through authentic activity and is supervised in the workplace • Placements are organised alongside taught curriculum • Experiencing practice in a variety of settings	QAA, 2018e Twigg and Yates, 2019 (non-ECS specific paper) DfE, 2012 (Nutbrown review)
Teaching and learning and assessment in HE programmes of study		
Learning and teaching	*Institutional teaching and learning strategy* • Focusing on student achievement and outcomes • Students should have access to relevant resources • The information available to students is clear and easily accessible • Institutions ensure high-quality learning irrespective of where, how and for whom it is delivered • There is a routine evaluation • Students play an active role in their studies and are enabled to evaluate their learning and engage in an ongoing dialogue with staff	QAA, 2018c Bass and Good, 2004 Higher Education Academy, 2011 Griffiths and Brophy, 2005 Luff et al., 2006

	The role of the teacher/tutors • Teachers acting as facilitators • Link teaching/learning to specific LOs of the qualification/module • Maintain balance between training (educare) and preparation for the unknown (educere) • Support student professional reflections • Strengthen student search skills for sources of information • Support students to negotiate conflicting literacies and discourses • Clarify academic terms and discourse introduced to ensure students' understanding	Papatheodorou, 2005 and 2010
Assessment	• Assessment methods and criteria are aligned to LOs and teaching activities • Students are consulted about the appropriateness of methods of assessment for different LOs • Students are supported and prepared for assessment and feedback is purposeful and supports the learning process • Assessment is explicit and transparent • It is efficient and manageable and encourages academic integrity • Assessment is approached holistically, and it is inclusive and equitable, reliable, consistent, fair, and valid • Lower levels of study to have lower LOs and assessment demands than those at later stages of learning • Assessment reflects rather than determines the curriculum • A variety of assessment techniques are used	QAA, 2018d QAA, 2019 Martin and Cloke, 2000
Assessment of group work	Group work assessment • To be used in the final year, where the students retain individuality while having acquired professional agency • To be used to assess non-academic LOs • To count towards the degree classification • Balanced and appropriately weighted with independent/individual work	Plastow et al., 2010 Papatheodorou, 2005 and 2010 Papatheodorou et al., 2007
Resources and career progression		

Resources	• Online/free resources – questions about students' ability to judge the validity and reliability of these resources • Carefully selected key reading to enhance further reading • Students give academic and unsubstantiated content similar weight	Bradwell et al., 2005 Luff et al., 2006 Griffiths and Brophy, 2005
Career progression	*High turnover rates* due to: • Low wages • Lack of career path progression • Career support is required during training	NDNA, 2016 Silberfeld and Mitchell, 2018 Campbell-Barr et al., 2020
Programme design and further advice and guidance		
Course/programme design and module planning	• The course design and development and approval meet the requirements of academic standards of the relevant national qualifications framework • The value of qualifications awarded is in line with sector-recognised standards • The course design is guided by internal institutional guidance and external reference points • There is institutional strategic oversight for consistent and transparent approval processes and outcomes • The course design processes are flexible and accessible • It involves staff development and requires student engagement	QAA, 2018b

	• Year-long modules give students time to explore, reflect and acquire in-depth knowledge of the subject area. But this requires:
	  ○ Staggered summative assessment throughout the module delivery and proactive planning
	  ○ Proactive support for formative assessment, enabling student self-reflection
		Papatheodorou et al., 2007

Further policy advice and guidance for HE qualifications	• Enabling student achievement • Student engagement • Partnerships • External expertise • Recruitment and admission • Concerns and complaints • Monitoring and evaluation, and research	QAA, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d; 2018e

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