

Programme specification

(Notes on how to complete this template are provide in Annexe 3)

1. Overview/ factual information

Programme/award title(s)	BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies Top-up Degree BA Early Childhood Studies Top-up Degree
Teaching Institution	New College Durham
Awarding Institution	The Open University (OU)
Date of first OU validation	05/07/2018
Date of latest OU (re)validation	01/03/2022
Next revalidation	01/03/ 2027
Credit points for the award	120 credits / Level 6
UCAS Code	L515
HECoS Code	
LDCS Code (FE Colleges)	
Programme start date and cycle of starts if appropriate.	September 2022
Underpinning QAA subject benchmark(s)	QAA Subject Benchmark Statement; Early Childhood Studies (2022). https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements/early-childhood-studies
Other external and internal reference points used to inform programme outcomes. For apprenticeships, the standard or framework against which it will be delivered.	QAA The Revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2018). https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (2014). https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf County Durham Children and Families Partnership; The Early Years Strategy Updated (2019). https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/22180/Updated-strategy-sets-out-partnership-approach-to-early-help-for-children-and-families County Durham Partnership (2019) Children and Young People's Strategy (2019-2022). Available online; http://www.countydurhampartnership.co.uk/media/28683/Children-and-Young-Peoples-Strategy-2019---2022/pdf/CYPS20192022.pdf

	<p>Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance (DfE 2019). https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-and-childcare--2</p> <p>GOV.UK (2019) Curriculum and qualifications: detailed information. https://www.gov.uk/topic/schools-colleges-childrens-services/curriculum-qualifications</p> <p>Department for Education (2021) Development Matters; Non statutory guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/914443/Development_Matters_-_Non-statutory_curriculum_guidance_for_the_early_years_foundation_stage_1_.pdf</p>
Professional/statutory recognition	None
For apprenticeships fully or partially integrated Assessment.	
Mode(s) of Study (PT, FT, DL, Mix of DL & Face-to-Face) Apprenticeship	Full Time (Face-to-face)
Duration of the programme for each mode of study	FT one year (two evenings per week)
Dual accreditation (if applicable)	
Date of production/revision of this specification	

Please note: This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if s/he takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided.

More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content, and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found in student module guide(s) and the students handbook.

The accuracy of the information contained in this document is reviewed by the University and may be verified by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

2.1 Educational aims and objectives

The recognition of the importance of the early years and childhood is irrefutable. Young children are especially sensitive to the influences that promote the acquisition of cognitive, social, self-regulation, language, and perceptual motor skills. These early experiences lay down the foundations for learning and confidence and supports children as they navigate future challenges. Several research studies indicate that more young children in the UK spend time in early years organisations and correlates with strong evidence that graduate practitioners have a positive impact on children's learning, the curriculum and pedagogy.

Therefore, this award has been designed through a carefully constructed programme, which challenges students to gain a critical understanding about early childhood and reflect on the contemporary issues that impact upon and influence the lives of young children. Students will build an understanding of factors affecting children within the wider and interdisciplinary context. Based within a socio-cultural paradigm, theoretical perspectives, policies, and research will translate into practice through the academic disciplines of each module. The vocational aspect aims to produce higher level and engaged students that value a child centred approach to care, learning and development.

The aim of the Early Childhood Studies Top-up programme is to address the sector requirement of improving the qualifications of practitioners particularly within the private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) early years sector. Current Government policy focuses on building a stronger, more capable workforce, with more rigorous training and qualifications (DfE 2017).

The early years children's workforce in particular is diverse, in terms of qualifications and experience. The Government funded independent review of early education and childcare qualifications by Professor Nutbrown in 2012 identified a national disparity with the majority holding a level three qualification or below. Several subsequent reports identify the importance of highly qualified professionals in the workplace (Bonetti 2018, CEEDA 2019, Pascal et al 2020). A recent systematic review on professional learning in early years education (The PLEYE Review) concluded that the UK policy driver is to continue to

improve the skills level of the early years workforce, raise the quality of early years education and reduce the disadvantage gap for young children (Rogers, Brown & Poblete 2020). This arguably can only be achieved by a graduate workforce.

The evidence suggests that those with higher levels of qualification at levels four, five and degree level specialism in early childhood, have the greatest impact in practice. The requirement of establishing and sustaining a highly qualified early years workforce is crucial for the next decade of the profession, particularly in consideration of an ageing of the most qualified in the workforce (Bonetti, 2018). Furthermore, the intent is to provide high quality practitioners equipped with the knowledge, skills, and behaviours they need to progress into a graduate early years / education workforce. Recent sector research suggests that there is an emerging crisis within the early years workforce with “77% of providers with vacancies” saying they are hard to fill. In addition to this, more than one in two providers (55%) say they have a serious skills gap in their workforce especially higher-level qualifications (CEEDA 2020).

Additionally, more than half of three- and four-year-old children taking up funded early education are in Nursery and Reception classes in schools. Meaning an identified increase in the requirement of early years practitioners and early years teachers within the statutory sector.

Commensurate with this is the local County Durham Children and Young People’s Strategy (2019) which identified that high-quality nursery and primary education mandates to meet all children’s needs. The focus is upon the increase in children being prepared and ready to learn and ready for school, children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception and improving child development outcomes age 2 to 5 years. These facts are particularly important considering current Government policy focusing on building a stronger, more capable early years workforce, with more rigorous training and qualifications.

Children in England are spending an increasing amount of their early lives in government-funded early years childcare (Bonetti 2018). Additionally, the UK Government is investing substantially in the early years through the offers of 30 hours of free early education and childcare for working parents and the ‘tax-free’ childcare scheme (Butler 2017). There are some key challenges in achieving this ambitious agenda which are sharpened in the current context of a post-pandemic and post-Brexit world.

Therefore, as students and early years practitioners develop critical thinking skills and undertake research projects which will hopefully challenge the negative and misinformed perceptions concerning the nature of work with young children and support the EY workforce in the development as a profession, particularly when it is ‘*de facto*’ now accountable for school readiness and later achievement in school (Rogers et al 2020).

The aims of the programme are:

Academic contribution enabling students to become confident, well-educated, and reflective practitioners with the skills to respond to developments in the field of early childhood studies.

- Enable the development of critical reasoning and analytical skills in relation to the context of early childhood to equip students with research skills, knowledge and understanding of how theory relating to children influences and informs current early years provision.
- Promote students to demonstrate the intellectual and study skills for the collection, interpretation, understanding, presentation and critical analysis of theory, policy and practice issues concerning early childhood.
- Encourage students to incorporate theoretical principles and knowledge of leadership, working with other professionals; working with families to meet needs of young children.
- Enable students to assimilate skills and aptitudes that constitute a platform from which they may successfully enter post-graduate study in related areas.

Upon successful completion of the award the students will have a critical knowledge, experience, and graduate capabilities to meet the needs of the employers within the early years / education sector, to gain meaningful employment. Those already employed within the industry will have the opportunities to progress and develop their knowledge and skills to further their career progression.

2.2 Relationship to other programmes and awards

(Where the award is part of a hierarchy of awards/programmes, this section describes the articulation between them, opportunities for progression upon completion of the programme, and arrangements for bridging modules or induction)

The top up year builds on and consolidates existing knowledge, understanding and skills of working with young children, strengthening the progression with the New College Durham FdA in Early Childhood Studies. The foundation degree was revalidated in April 2021 and the module specifications and content have direct underpinning knowledge to support purposeful transition and progression to level 6.

The profile of skills developed from level three includes the opportunity for students who have a competency early years qualification to gain meaningful employment alongside a strong platform to study at undergraduate level (at present 90% of the level five cohort 2021-22 are all employed either as teaching assistants or early years practitioners). As expected, the foundation degree develops higher order thinking skills, critical reflection, and offers students a variety of summative assessment methods such as; case studies, portfolio's, reflective journals, reports, individual and group presentations, 'show and tell' presentation, develop an artifact/resource to support young children's

awareness of equality and inclusion, reflection on planning observation and assessment of young children.

Module content supports transition to level six by the introduction to the concept of childhood and sociological ideologies, modern-day issues such as the child as a consumer, the global child including internationalism, the development of the rights of the child in a changing world and the social and emotional foundations for children's learning. This module is particularly contemporaneous as self-regulation and executive function being the new sixth key feature of effective practice found in the revised EYFS Development Matters (2021).

Strengthening research skills and planning a research proposal at level five in anticipation of the level six primary research project forms the hierarchy of the early childhood higher education courses. The study module introduces students to conducting a literature review and approaches to seek appropriate academic materials through relevant search strategies.

Inclusive in the transition process from level five to six the students are given pre-course module specific reading journals and early preparative tasks for the ethics application.

In order not to discriminate against external applicants a strategy put into place was to strengthen the interview and meet the academic tutor process. This is to ensure all external students have the commensurate research skills that the progressing NCD students have.

As part of the Professional Academic and Reflective Development module at level five, students have to critique an identified academic article using the critical appraisal skills programme (CASP) tool, demonstrate a good understanding of qualitative and quantitative research methodology and produce a research proposal. The pre-interview task reflects these skills therefore the learning outcomes have been incorporated into this written task. The pre-interview task includes writing a short research proposal, a narrative on the distinct differences in research methodology and to critique an academic article using the CASP tool.

The rationale is not only to ensure skills are equitable, but the process is fair particularly when the majority of the cohort are internal progression students. Further consideration is that as students have to undertake primary research as part of the dissertation module this underpinning research knowledge is fundamental as the ethics application is undertaken within twelve weeks of induction. Feedback from the one external student that completed the programme in the last academic year 2019-20 did identify it was good pre-course preparation and supported a recap of their research skills.

The course has been designed to welcome students from a range of backgrounds and aims to create a learning community through initial induction, diagnostic and teamwork activities. Overseas student applications through UCAS would be subject to APEL / RPL in line with NCD policy and inclusive of the pre-course tasks.

Upon successful completion of the award, the students will have critical knowledge, be able to analyse current and emergent issues in early childhood (0-8 years) and to contextualise this. The intention is to facilitate professional development and career choices encouraging intellectual capabilities, reflection and analytical skills specifically related to the pedagogy of early childhood. Students will demonstrate graduate capabilities to further their career objectives.

2.3 For Foundation Degrees, please list where the 60-credit work-related learning takes place. For apprenticeships an articulation of how the work based learning and academic content are organised with the award.

Not applicable.

2.4 List of all exit awards

BA (Honours) Early Childhood Studies Top-up Degree 120 credits.

BA Early Childhood Studies Top-up Degree 60 credits.

3. Programme structure and learning outcomes

(The structure for any part-time delivery should be presented separately in this section.)

Programme Structure - LEVEL 6					
Compulsory modules	Credit points	Optional modules	Credit points	Is module compensatable?	Semester runs in
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECS601 Contemporary Project in Early Years (Dissertation) Module 	40	No		No	Yearlong
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECS602 Early Years Policy and Practice 	20	No		Yes	One
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECS603 Contemporary Issues in Research with Young Children 	20	No		Yes	One
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECS604 Leading Learning in Early Years 	20	No		Yes	Two
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECS605 The Pedagogy of Play in Early Years 	20	No		Yes	Two

Intended learning outcomes at Level 6 are listed below:

<u>Learning Outcomes – LEVEL 6</u>	
3A. Knowledge and understanding	
Learning outcomes:	Learning and teaching strategy/ assessment methods
<p>A1 A systematic knowledge of a range of research paradigms, research methods and measurement techniques, and awareness of their limitations.</p> <p>A2 Reason clearly, understand the role of evidence and make critical judgements about arguments relating to the subject area of early childhood studies.</p> <p>A3 A systematic knowledge and critical understanding of all aspects of significant policy and provision for babies and young children, families, and communities.</p> <p>A4 Understand the conceptual underpinnings of early childhood studies as a subject area, its historical origins, development, and limitations.</p>	<p>The learning, teaching and assessment methods throughout the programme will use the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Subject Benchmark Statement(s) for Early Childhood Studies (2022) as a reference point and indicators of overall expectations of students' knowledge, skills and understanding of the Early Years Sector.</p> <p>A variety of teaching methods will be utilised throughout the programme to accommodate different learning styles and provide a rich and varied learning experience. The purpose of lectures is to disseminate theoretical and empirical information. The lectures will deliver the indicative content of each of the specific modules (see module specifications).</p> <p>As this is a level 6 programme the active use of self-directed learning will be promoted, the mode of teaching will be based on traditional methods of lecturers, workshops, and work-based reflection of professional practices. There will be opportunities for self-directed group work and projects allowing for peer discussion</p>

<u>Learning Outcomes – LEVEL 6</u>	
3A. Knowledge and understanding	
<p>A5 Understanding of multi professional, inter-professional, multiagency, and inter-agency working as a means to meeting the needs of babies and young children.</p>	<p>and learning as well as individual and collective problem solving and action learning. Lectures will allow the students to engage effectively in academic discussion and present arguments of the interplay of economic, professional, ethical, collaborative, and legal obligations. Individual project supervision sessions will allow students to establish and discuss their development. Summative assessment methods are module specific (see specifications) alongside regular formative assessment using virtual learning environments (VLE) discussion groups, journal club and workshops.</p>
3B. Cognitive skills	
Learning outcomes:	Learning and teaching strategy/ assessment methods
<p>B1 Identify meaningful patterns in play, behaviour and experience and evaluate their significance.</p> <p>B2 Apply multiple perspectives to early childhood issues, recognising that early childhood studies involve a range of research methods, theories, evidence, and applications.</p> <p>B3 Analyse and constructively critique theories, practice, and research in the area of child development.</p>	<p>A range of student-centred teaching and learning approaches will be utilised. Within individual project supervision sessions, students will be encouraged to plan and generate innovative ideas from practice and enquiry-based learning.</p> <p>This will challenge and support students to demonstrate intellectual flexibility and openness to new ideas, pedagogy and make independent judgements on innovation, practice, and project research.</p>

3B. Cognitive skills	
	<p>Critical analysis will engage students with opportunities to question research articles and critique sources of information.</p> <p>Workshops will allow students to discuss their assessments and project sharing experiences of the implementation and the outcomes of their projects.</p> <p>Students will be allocated a supervisor; within individual project supervision tutorial, learners will be overseen to complete the individual project in conjunction with HE academic and tutorial guidance.</p>
3C. Practical and professional skills	
Learning outcomes:	Learning and teaching strategy/ assessment methods
<p>C1 Demonstrate a well-developed knowledge and awareness of the skills needed for different relational pedagogical approaches.</p> <p>C2 Interpret and use numerical and other forms of data critically and securely.</p> <p>C3 Use a range of sources of information critically.</p> <p>C4 Initiate, design, conduct and report an empirically based early childhood research project under appropriate supervision.</p>	<p>Students will engage in debates and discussion explaining the central arguments of a range of contemporary issues within the seminar sessions. They will analyse scenarios, apply to their own practice area, and communicate with others in a clear and articulate manner.</p> <p>Lectures and workshops will allow the learners to engage effectively in academic discussion and present arguments of the interplay of economic, professional, ethical, and legal obligations. They will undertake this utilising a variety of sources; argumentative or discussion-based articles, peer reviewed journals, academic monographs, edited collections, grey literature Open Athens, Discovery and alternative search engines.</p>

3C. Practical and professional skills	
	<p>Within the individual project supervision sessions, students will be encouraged to plan and generate innovative ideas and conduct an early years empirically primary research-based project; inclusive of data collection, analysis, and dissemination.</p> <p>An inclusive learning environment is through promoting inclusion, diversity, and equal opportunity. These issues are deeply embedded within the nature and extent of the early childhood studies curriculum.</p>
3D. Key/transferable skills	
Learning outcomes:	Learning and teaching strategy/ assessment methods
<p>D1 Use the communication skills necessary to effectively converse, debate, negotiate, persuade, and challenge the ideas of others.</p> <p>D2 Use information and communications technology (ICT) appropriately in a range of contexts.</p> <p>D3 Become more independent, resilient, responsible, and pragmatic and develop as an autonomous learner.</p> <p>D4 Write for different purposes, which include persuasion, explanation, description, evaluation and judgement, recount, recap, hypothesize, and summary.</p>	<p>Key/transferable skills are incorporated within modules and related to relevant module summative assessment.</p> <p>Tutorial sessions will allow students to review their academic progress.</p> <p>Workshops and tutorials devoted to supporting and developing individual presentation skills will be held during the induction and workshop sessions of modules that have summative presentations. Here, they will have the opportunity to engage in personal planning and skills development having the opportunity to challenge and question their peers and interrogate a range of evidence.</p>

3D. Key/transferable skills	
<p>D5 Undertake self-directed study and project management in a supportive environment.</p> <p>D6 Apply sufficient and relevant research at this level and acknowledge sources within the prescribed referencing system.</p>	<p>Reflexivity and self-direction is actively promoted to generate motivated independent graduates.</p> <p>Students will use a variety of technology to access key resources and demonstrate digital literacy. Students' key skills, such as time management and communication will be enhanced and developed by active engagement in the reading and academic tasks set.</p>

4. Distinctive features of the programme structure

- **Where applicable, this section provides details on distinctive features such as:**
 - where in the structure above a professional/placement year fits in and how it may affect progression
 - any restrictions regarding the availability of elective modules
 - where in the programme structure students must make a choice of pathway/route
- **Additional considerations for apprenticeships:**
 - how the delivery of the academic award fits in with the wider apprenticeship
 - the integration of the 'on the job' and 'off the job' training
 - how the academic award fits within the assessment of the apprenticeship

This course provides a challenging and broad-based curriculum relevant to the holistic needs of the students. It reflects the current and projected requirements of the local early years and primary sector in County Durham. The linking of theory and practice is integral throughout the whole programme. Integral to level six learning is reflective evidence from practice within the professional, academic, and reflective development modules at level 4 and 5.

A thematic approach enables students to see the natural progression from one module to another, and across the programmes with a strong expectation of reflection on children's learning and observation in an ecological context that situates young children as active participants in the lives of families, society, and cultures.

The widening participation and lifelong learning ethos of the programme enables those students to take a vocationally embedded route into teaching considering the following options after level six;

School-centred initial teacher training (SCITT).

Early years initial teacher training (EYITT).

Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

Professional Graduate Certificate in Education.

Graduate Teaching Apprenticeship.

Managerial role in PVI sector.

Master's Degree in Childhood Studies (some Universities combine it with a PGCE).

Post-compulsory qualification in education - Further Education.

Alternative Master's Degree's – Occupational therapy, Speech and Language therapy, Counselling and Social Work.

The programme is expected to continue the internal progression opportunities evident at level 3 to the FdA. The HE education staff in early years nurture student's development, which embeds a feeling of security that offers unique positive relationships. This forms a 'sense of belonging' and culture within NCD

which maintains successful recruitment. Bespoke and smaller cohort size ensures successful retention.

NCD's teaching and learning strategy and principles are embedded throughout the programme. Lectures, workshops, guided study, and employment experiences develop students' learning and understanding of early childhood. A wide range of assessment types have been included which encourage the development of different academic skills and attributes. The VLE is used effectively across and within all modules to support the learning experience for students. This includes the use of interactive materials such as case studies, videos, discussion threads and use of online marking and feedback tools. Pastoral support is a key feature of the programme, and these are provided through a variety of mechanisms.

Covid-19 has highlighted the role of early years organisations as providers of essential 'childcare', but the priority is actually supporting children's wellbeing, development and learning at a vital time in children's lives. Workforce quality is key to addressing gaps both in terms of attainment and emotional wellbeing as early as possible, and in improving a child's long-term life chances and social mobility. Graduate practitioners go part way to fulfilling this gap.

Therefore, the programme reflects the requirements to address improvement in the knowledge and skills of the early years workforce, respond to the government's shift in early year's policy and increase opportunities for students to take a vocational route into teaching and management. Early Childhood Studies graduates are therefore expected to be effective advocates for children in whatever capacity they work.

5. Support for students and their learning.

(For apprenticeships this should include details of how student learning is supported in the work place)

Support for students and their learning is offered throughout the programme via; induction, a nominated personal tutor, individual tutorials, group tutorials and access to support mechanisms such as the HE Academic Support Tutor. Students are encouraged to access personal learning coaches and specific support for disabled students for example; personal support profiles and specialist equipment.

Student Induction

Adult learning principles underpin the induction strategy aimed at empowering students to make the most of their higher education experience and take responsibility for their learning. During the welcome and induction period

students are informed regarding college expectations, academic regulations and are given the opportunity to overview the programme. There is an overview of the modules, scheme of learning and assessment schedule. This is in order for students to gain an understanding of the necessary study and criticality required to demonstrate good academic practice and integrity.

Induction is an essential aspect particularly for mature students returning to study.

Students will be advised that, consistent with adult learning principles, they will be expected to be active and independent learners. The learning and teaching approaches that will be used are aimed at empowering, enabling, and facilitating learning, demonstrating self-direction, sound time management skills in completing tasks/assignments, developing transferable skills, linking theory and practice in creative and innovative ways, and critically evaluating and applying new learning to reflect and problem solve.

In addition, students will be informed that they will submit their assignments electronically through Turnitin, which impacts positively on students' learning as it provides feedback on originality and avoids plagiarism. Students will be able to check their presentation of references/citations and their similarity scores.

Cohort identity is addressed at the very beginning of the programme and students appoint a representative who will ensure that their views are heard through a number of HE and higher education student forums within the college.

Throughout the programme students will be provided with opportunities to be part of the community of learning and develop networks, learn together with each other and staff, sharing knowledge, solving problems, and exchanging ideas and frustrations. The VLE, as an interactive tool, will play a significant role in the development of the community of learning alongside continued provision of the journal club.

Overview of Support Arrangements

Support needs are addressed with students on an individual basis during diagnostic activities taking place within induction. Those students who are new to the college, and not previously known to the course team, are encouraged to engage with additional support via personal learning coach (PLC) and academic support tutor to ensure fluid transition into level 6 study.

- **Internal Students (Progressing from an NCD FdA course)**
Designated personal tutor and 1-1 tutorials.
Optional personal learning coach (PLC) Support / continued support for those previously using PLC's.
Access to HE academic support tutor.
Completion of pre-course transition tasks.
- **International Students (Progressing from an overseas institution)**

APEL /RPL procedure will be undertaken and assessment where English is not their first language. Entrants must demonstrate appropriate reading, comprehension, and academic writing skills and to successfully demonstrate practice experience and vocational knowledge.

Evidence of current early years sector experience validated from an appropriate organisation.

Completion of the pre-course assessment tasks to ensure equity in terms of research skills.

Designated personal tutor and 1-1 tutorials.

Support from NCD International Office.

Opportunity for additional tutorials with all module tutors during induction period of semester 1.

Personal learning coach (PLC) Support encouraged.

Access to HE academic support tutor encouraged.

- **External UK Students (progressing from a UK institution)**

APEL procedure will be undertaken with evidence of appropriate vocational experience.

Completion of the pre-course assessment tasks to ensure equity in terms of research skills.

Personal tutor and 1-1 tutorials.

Opportunity for additional tutorials with all module tutors during induction period of semester 1.

Personal learning coach (PLC) support encouraged.

Access to academic support tutor encouraged.

Nominated Personal Tutor System

A comprehensive personal tutor system is in place to make sure that students have direct personal contact with an individual member of the course team to discuss academic and personal matters relevant to their learning. All students are allocated a personal tutor when first registering to the course. It is intended wherever possible a student will have the same personal tutor for the length of their course. The personal tutor will be responsible for the induction programme to ensure students are conversant with the course. At the induction, the personal tutor will meet students to ascertain any particular learning or support needs and thereafter will meet with individual students on a regular basis to monitor progress and discuss any issues arising.

The effective tutoring and dissertation supervision on this programme has seen an improved trajectory of attainment (see page 5 in the background document).

Academic Support

In addition to support from their personal tutor, each student will receive academic support from module tutors. Support is given to students via tutorials at set intervals during the academic year and there is likely to be opportunity for additional sessions during group tutorials. Further support is available within

critique-based activities where both tutor and peers are able to give constructive advice as to the progress and development of visual based assignment work. Students have access to a dedicated HE academic support tutor by either self-referral or guided by the nominated tutor.

Students are supported in preparation for assessments by their module tutor and where relevant other academic staff within the course team. Students have access to additional academic support particular to assessment tasks from an independent HE academic support tutor. The tutor offers specific study skills advice and guidance on academic writing, assignment/essay planning and structuring, The Harvard system (for reference lists and bibliographies), Open Athens and online information retrieval, literature searching, presentation skills, reading efficiently and report writing. Electronic advice and guidance booklets are available on the student intranet to download.

In order to protect students against unfair competition, the college needs to ensure that the students are not submitting assessments, which have been copied or plagiarised, or which are not substantially the student's own work. The college uses the software Turnitin to enable staff and students to check work for originality. Students can upload their assignments prior to submission for marking and get a report confirming their similarity reports. This can be extremely effective in ensuring against plagiarism and providing students and module leaders with the confidence that the work is original.

Module specific material is provided on the course VLE; this information is reviewed and updated annually to coincide with the nature and specific requirements of assignments being delivered in a given year. Documents include the course handbook, module guides with assessment briefs, signposting to useful resources, common academic literature, and PowerPoint presentations.

Self-directed study is an important aspect of the course that will enable students the opportunity to develop their assignments when resources are not available outside of the college campus. Office 365 is available to all students and VMWare to access the college hard drive remotely.

Pastoral Support

The college is committed to providing a high quality, confidential and impartial information, and advice and guidance service. This is provided by the comprehensive ASC (advice, support, career service). All students receive induction on the ASC service at the start of their course. The ASC service is designed to provide effective and timely information, advice and guidance on funding and welfare, career planning and provides access to confidential personal counselling support.

The ASC service offers appointments and a 'drop-in' service. ASC information is also available to download from the college website, intranet or to pick up from the dedicated ASC area.

The PLC service does not have any specific criteria for referral, and any student who may benefit from such support can access the service. Their tutor, module leader and external advisor, such as ASC or by themselves, can refer students. This personalised referral system helps in identifying new students as well as continuing communication with progressing students. There is a dedicated page on the college intranet.

Additional Learning Support

Student's academic writing and study skills are assessed through the process of a pre-course task, interview task and if relevant a referral for additional support which will be made to the learning support team as a proactive measure.

If students feel they need any additional learning support during their programme this can be arranged through the college learning support service and the Higher Education Disability Advisor. A team approach to monitoring student progress is essential to ensure intervention is proactive rather than reactive, the ideal mechanism to facilitate this is through the tutorial system.

Financial Support

Through the admissions process students are encouraged to access a range of avenues to secure funding for their programme of study. This includes a review of official government websites, employers, or personal guidance on the range of funding available to them. This can be identified in a one-to-one consultation with ASC and the Students' Union. Furthermore, New College Durham has a hardship fund that students on low incomes can apply for twice throughout the academic year.

6. Criteria for admission

(For apprenticeships this should include details of how the criteria will be used with employers who will be recruiting apprentices.)

The College Admissions Policy is aligned to QAA Quality Code expectations, core and guiding principles for Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access; it is clear to prospective students how the recruitment, selection and admission process will be conducted. The selection processes for entry into higher education are underpinned by transparent entry requirements, both standard and non-standard. This corresponds to NCD Academic Regulations Section E; regulatory principles governing recruitment and admission to higher education programmes. Valid and reliable methods of application and selection

assessment are utilised by the team; correlation of entry criteria is available via the programme specifications, online website information and interview criteria. This triangulation ensures consistency and fairness by the course team. Marketing information is regularly checked for accuracy in terms of pre-entry requirements, changes to course specifications and timetables.

Widening participation and inclusion strategies include ensuring those students with protected characteristics are pro-actively encouraged to attend NCD HE learning support and apply for DSA funding pre-course.

Additionally, the Early Childhood Studies programmes often attract students who wish to undertake a vocationally embedded route into graduate practice, 70% of students are first generation in their families to attend HE (Subject level TEF Education & Training 2019).

To gain entry to the programme a student must satisfy the standard or non-standard entry requirements to the course. Candidates with non-standard entry applications will be considered based on relevant work experience and attainment of skills, which demonstrate an ability to study at this level.

Given the wide experience of potential applicants to this course, applications for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) are welcomed in accordance with the New College Durham Academic Regulations.

Standard Entry Criteria:

Hold a current Level 5 qualification (FdA/HND) in an Early Years related discipline - or the international equivalent of 120 ECTS Credits.

External applicants must be interviewed (international applicants via internet/email respectively).

Hold Level 2 or equivalent in English Language (or a minimum IELTS score of 6 with no element below 5.5 in all components; speaking, listening, reading, and writing required for international applicants, additionally a formative written piece of work may be requested during the application process).

Hold Level 2 or equivalent in Maths.

Hold a Clear Enhanced DBS.

Provide evidence of appropriate and current early years/education employment.

This must be verified by the organisation manager or head teacher.

Non-Standard Entry Criteria:

Hold a Level 5 qualification (FdA/HND) in an Early Years related discipline - or the international equivalent of 120 ECTS Credits.

New Early Years Lead Practitioner L5 (Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education from 2023, with pre course tasks).

There may be a length of time between completion of an appropriate level 5 qualification before application to the top-up award. Evidence of CPD and recent and extensive early years' experience required.

All applicants with non-standard criteria must be interviewed.

Level 2 or equivalent in English Language (or a minimum IELTS score of 6 with no element below 5.5 in all components; speaking, listening, reading, and writing required for international applicants, additionally a formative written piece of work may be requested during the application process).

Level 2 or equivalent in Maths.

Clear Enhanced DBS.

Evidence of appropriate current early years/education employment and/or volunteering experience within the sector.

During the interview / discussion students will:

- Identify and explain their prior experience, professional, personal, or voluntary work. Evidence of original certificates, motivation for undertaking the course and areas of interest within the programme.
- The student's perception of key qualities and attributes to work in the sector in line with values-based recruitment.

Externally applicants must demonstrate appropriate level of reading comprehension and academic writing during the written component of the interview process. This is a directed research task commensurate with research skills expected for Level 6 study and provided prior to an interview date.

Recruitment Activities:

Selection of students is undertaken via robust and strong advice and guidance. Recruitment of internal progression students is commensurate to those external applications to measure eligibility.

Pre-entry requirements are stated clearly on the college website. Potential students complete an online application form, the course team will scrutinise details and qualifications for match to the entry criteria. If an applicant has the entry criteria, they will be invited for a meeting with the course leader. All discussions have a set format with set questions and informal discussions regarding sector experiences and requirements of working with children such as; enhanced DBS and current employment. Conditional offers are made on the outcome of these undertaken by the course team.

The programme leader has had opportunities to visit early years organisations and schools to observe and support current undergraduates. As part of the process, information regarding the programme is given to managers and employers including those practitioners and teaching assistants who may be interested to complete a graduate course.

HE open events, advice and guidance evenings and the summer Contact Centre facilitates a range of opportunities for all prospective students. This included keeping warm activities such as the Zoom coffee mornings for all new students and pre-induction tasks. The pre-induction tasks offer an insight into expectations of level six study.

Promotional materials cover the breadth of the courses and are available through a wide range of outreach events and activities; open events, school liaison, word of mouth, through employer contacts and an alumni social networking group.

Marketing events ensure promotion of past success stories utilising flyers and the website, these are vignettes from post graduate students; progression to teaching, EY management and post graduate studies (MA). Specific HE open events are held twice a year on a Saturday undertaken by the course team and undergraduate students.

7. Language of study

The course is conducted using English language.

8. Information about non-OU standard assessment regulations (including PSRB requirements)

The programme will follow Open University regulations, there are no PSRB requirements.

9. For apprenticeships in England End Point Assessment (EPA).

(Summary of the approved assessment plan and how the academic award fits within this and the EPA)

Not applicable.

10. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning.

The college articulates a strategic approach to learning in terms of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy which stipulates the College's position and the responsibilities of students, staff, and management. QAA Quality Code expectations, core, and guiding principles; Learning and Teaching underpins this approach.

At course level, strategies are tailored to the student cohort in terms of professional experiences that inform and are informed by student knowledge, skills and attributes providing enrichment and experiential learning within the programme overall. The course team believes this provides all students with the potential to put theory into practice and consider the wider context relating to early years provision and childhood. The teaching, learning and assessment strategy is shared with the students on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and displayed within the main classroom alongside the external examiner reports.

New approaches to e-learning and digital literacy were developed due to Covid-19 being a catalyst for the rapid adoption of digital teaching, learning and assessment. Students now have access to a range of online resources such as Office365, Teams, IT equipment and technical support. Additional funding from both New College Durham and the Office for Students had been made available to all students in terms of support with equipment and access to Wi-Fi. This was to ensure no student was disadvantaged by any barriers in terms of digital poverty. This alongside upskilling HE lecturing staff with training on promotion of using Teams, e-learning delivery, and strategies.

Capturing the Student Voice

The contribution of the student voice is a critical quality element at the College in line with QAA Quality Code expectations, core, and guiding principles: Monitoring and Evaluation, specifically principles 4, 5 and 6 which looks at who is involved in the process of monitoring performance of teaching learning and assessment, using this information to make improvements, and evaluating change. It is focussed around strengthening teaching and learning and responsiveness to individual need; strengthening student participation and representation; creating a culture of student involvement, all of which ensures that the 'student voice' is the centre of the curriculum. Regular and systematic evaluation by students occurs through the following mechanisms; module and course feedback, student cohort representative's attendance at school and college level forums, regular course team meetings. Marketing information is in the form of success stories / case studies from previous students.

An anonymous student comments and suggestions e-mail address is accessible via the student intranet. This ensures that students are able to have their opinions heard and acted upon to facilitate improvements in their provision from

outside formal forum meeting arrangements, where appropriate. Additionally, the HE student forum page on the NCD intranet allows student representatives to add questions or comments where key college staff can respond. The site is visible to all students so they can see answers to questions, and access student forum minutes and other relevant documentation.

The course leader actively encourages dialogue with student representatives outside of formal meetings with an informal and reciprocal approach. Survey feedback is evaluated in HE quality reviews and the annual programme evaluation. This critically evaluates all feedback including surveys, module, and overall course feedback. If pertinent, the quality enhancement plan will have an action following student feedback. Conversely, all positive feedback is populated in the annual programme evaluation.

10. Changes made to the programme since last (re)validation

No changes to the course programme modules but there have been several changes in staffing since the original validation in 2018.

Whilst there are no significant changes to the overall framework of the programme, module content remains contemporaneous.

For instance;

ECS602 Early Years Policy and Practice module considers both historical and current aspects of policy such as safeguarding, special educational needs, Ofsted requirements and workforce strategy and quality. Students must appraise current policy and through the assessment methods question orthodoxy of the policy using a logical and supported argument.

ECS603 Contemporary Issues in Research with Young Children considers research on, with and by children whilst considering the debate regarding childhood, the voice of the child and children as active participants in today's global society.

ECS604 Leading Learning in Early Years students have to evaluate the leadership and management of their own organisation.

ECS605 Pedagogy of Play in Early Years develops critical understanding of play but in the context of Covid-19 have to consider technology advances and play deprivation and the impact.

ECS601 Contemporary Project in Early Years (dissertation) permits students to choose an area of topical pertinence and undertake a primary research project and include the opportunity to include children in the primary research project. The following are a few examples to demonstrate the diversity of topics, applied to contemporary and innovative practice;

The Mindfulness Garden: Do quiet spaces support self-regulation in young children? The practitioner's perspective.

What is the Importance of Cultural Learning?

A practitioner's perspective of the effectiveness of communication boards in supporting socialisation in young children.

Practitioner's views on using a school-based dog to support young children's emotional development.

What are practitioners' perceptions on the effect that innovative mark making activities has on boys' future writing skills?

A correlational study of imaginative play and emotional regulation in childhood: professional discourse analysis in primary education.

The evaluation of continuous provision in key stage one, from the perspective of practitioners.

Junk Modelling: How can creative play encourage children ages 4-6 to recycle and care for their environment. The Practitioners Perspective.

Annexe 1: Curriculum map

Annexe 2: Notes on completing the OU programme specification template

Annexe 1 - Curriculum map

This table indicates which study units assume responsibility for delivering (shaded) and assessing (✓) particular programme learning outcomes.

Level	Study module/unit	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	C4	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
6	ECS601 Contemporary Project in Early Years	✓	✓				✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	ECS 602 Early Years Policy and Practice		✓	✓		✓			✓			✓		✓			✓		
	ECS603 Contemporary Issues in Research with Young Children	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓		✓					
	ECS 604 Leading Learning in Early Years		✓			✓			✓	✓		✓					✓	✓	
	ECS605 The Pedagogy of Play in Early Years		✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓					✓	✓	

Annexe 2: Notes on completing programme specification templates

- 1 - This programme specification should be mapped against the learning outcomes detailed in module specifications.
- 2 – The expectations regarding student achievement and attributes described by the learning outcome in section 3 must be appropriate to the level of the award within the **QAA frameworks for HE qualifications**: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/Pages/default.aspx>
- 3 – Learning outcomes must also reflect the detailed statements of graduate attributes set out in **QAA subject benchmark statements** that are relevant to the programme/award: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/subject-guidance/Pages/Subject-benchmark-statements.aspx>
- 4 – In section 3, the learning and teaching methods deployed should enable the achievement of the full range of intended learning outcomes. Similarly, the choice of assessment methods in section 3 should enable students to demonstrate the achievement of related learning outcomes. Overall, assessment should cover the full range of learning outcomes.
- 5 - Where the programme contains validated **exit awards** (e.g. CertHE, DipHE, PGDip), learning outcomes must be clearly specified for each award.
- 6 - For programmes with distinctive study **routes or pathways** the specific rationale and learning outcomes for each route must be provided.
- 7 – Validated programmes delivered in **languages other than English** must have programme specifications both in English and the language of delivery.