



An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthaí Óige  
Department of  
Children and Youth Affairs

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**Early Years(Pre-school) Regulations and DCYA  
Childcare Programmes Qualification Requirements  
and  
DCYA Qualifications Recognition Application Process**

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## **Glossary of Terms:**

**Early Years (Pre-school) Regulations (also referred to as ‘Regulations’ ‘Pre-school Regulations’):** These are the pending regulations as provided for in the Child Care Act 1991, as amended by the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 Part VIIA. This title is not the final title of the regulations and will be amended accordingly once the Regulations are published.

**DCYA Childcare Programmes:** These are the childcare funding programmes managed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

**Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) (also referred to as ‘the Free Pre-school Year):** DCYA Childcare funding programme.

**Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI):** QQI has responsibility to develop, promote and maintain the Irish NFQ. QQI also facilitates the recognition of foreign qualifications.

**National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ):** The Irish NFQ, established in 2003, is a framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way. The many different types and sizes of awards included in the NFQ, are organised based on their level of knowledge, skill and competence. Because all NFQ awards are quality assured learners can be confident that they will be recognised at home and abroad.

**National Academy Recognition Centre (NARIC):** NARIC provides advice on the academic recognition of an international qualification by comparing it, where possible, to a major award at a certain level on the Irish National Qualifications Framework (NFQ).

**DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications:** List of awards either national or international that have been reviewed and deemed acceptable to meet the requirements of the Regulations and DCYA Childcare Programmes Contracts. This list may be updated in the future as further qualifications are reviewed and/or policy contexts develop.

**Qualification (also referred to as Award throughout the document):** A certification of confirmation that the holder completed the relevant course and passed all course modules/components.

**Aistear:** *The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*

**Síolta:** *The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.*

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# 1. Early Years Pre-school Regulations and DCYA Childcare Programmes Qualification Requirements

## 1.1 Background

Prior to the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme in 2010, there was no minimum qualification requirement for staff working in the Early Years sector. The contract for the ECCE programme introduced a requirement that all pre-school leaders should have achieved a major award in early childhood care and education at a minimum of level 5 on the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ) in Ireland or equivalent. Further, a higher rate of capitation funding was available to Early Years settings where the Preschool Leader had achieved a major award in early childhood care and education at a minimum of level 7 on the NFQ or equivalent and other assistant staff had achieved the minimum level 5 award. The requirement for staff in early years settings had long been advocated for by the early years sector in Ireland as the qualification of staff has been identified in national and international research literature as a central contributing factor in the achievement of high quality early years provision and experiences for children. This development therefore represented a major step forward in improving the quality of early years services.

In 2013 a National Early Years Quality Agenda was announced in order to improve quality in Early Years services. This initiative comprised a range of measures including the introduction of a regulatory requirement that all staff working with children in pre-school services should hold a qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education at a minimum of Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ) or equivalent. Further, the contract for the ECCE programme would require that all Pre-school Leaders in ECCE services would be required to hold a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at a minimum of Level 6 on the NFQ, or equivalent.

**The new Early Years (Pre-school) Regulations which are being prepared will provide that every person working directly with pre-school children (with the exception of interns, students or volunteers) must hold a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ) or equivalent qualification.**

## 1.2 What qualifications will be recognised under the new Early Years (Pre-School) Regulations?

A Major Award in Childcare/Early Childhood Education at Level 5 on the NFQ or equivalent will be recognised under the Regulations.

The NFQ is a ten-level system (1–10) giving an academic or vocational value to qualifications obtained in Ireland. NFQ levels help indicate how an award can be used for training, education and employment opportunities. Each level is based on nationally agreed standards of what a learner is expected to know and be able to do after receiving an award. In recognition that the NFQ does not cover all qualifications that may be equivalent and/or suitably relevant to working with the early years pre-schools services in Ireland e.g. historic/legacy qualifications that pre-date the NFQ, international qualifications etc., the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has prepared a list of **DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications**<sup>1</sup> which will be used as the identifying list of acceptable qualifications for the purposes of meeting the requirements of the Regulations and DCYA Childcare Programmes Contracts. This list has been derived from a review of qualification certification submitted to the DCYA, in relation to staff already working in Early Years services on contract to deliver the ECCE Programme. In preparing the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications all decisions on the acceptability of these qualifications have been reviewed against a set of criteria including core knowledge and skills identified as essential for practice in Early Years settings. As a result of this review, qualifications previously deemed acceptable by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, for the purposes of the ECCE Programme, may not continue to be acceptable for the purposes of the new Regulations or the DCYA Childcare Programmes Contracts.

### 1.3 What if my Qualification is not published on the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications?

Where a qualification is **not published on the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications** but the holder considers it to be an appropriate Major Award at Level 5 on the NFQ or equivalent, the holder can apply (see DCYA Early Years Qualifications Recognition Application Process for details) to have their qualification assessed for approval. If it is approved for recognition the details of the qualification will be added<sup>2</sup> to the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications.

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<sup>1</sup>Having a qualification on the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications does not represent direct alignment/equivalency to Major Awards set out by QQI, right of access to employment, any other regulated profession other than Early Years Services in Ireland or education and training. Recognition decisions for the purposes of accessing further education and/or employment are made by education institutions, professional recognition bodies and employers.

<sup>2</sup>In some circumstances an individual's specific circumstances of qualification, or group of qualifications, may be deemed as suitable for recognition to meet the requirements of the Regulations and DCYA Childcare Programmes Contracts for that individual only and will not be added to the published list. In such cases the individual will receive a letter of approval from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs which will satisfy the requirements of the Early Years (Preschool) Regulations.

## 1.4 My qualification pre-dates the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications. How do I find out if it is equivalent to the nationally accredited awards?

Due to the absence of any qualification requirements to practice in the early years sector in Ireland prior to 2010, a wide range of courses of varying content, volume and level of learning were available to individuals who wished to pursue a career working in early years services. Some of these were nationally accredited by a range of awarding bodies, both national and international and others were awarded by private educational institutions. These awards are referred to as 'legacy awards' due to the fact that they are no longer available, having been decommissioned or replaced by more current awards.

In the field of Childcare/Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland the main legacy awards were made by the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) or FÁS. These bodies made awards at Levels 1, 2 and 3 and these are now placed on the NFQ at Levels 4, 5 and 6. Therefore, if you have an award certificate issued by NCVA or FÁS for a level 2 Major award, i.e., all required elements have been completed, this is recognised as equivalent to a Major Level 5 award.

There are many 'legacy awards' held by Early Years staff that the QQI are not in a position to align as a Major Award Level on the NFQ. Some of these qualifications were brought to the Department's attention in the context of applications for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme Contracts. These qualifications were assessed by the Early Years Policy and Programmes Unit, in association with the Early Years Education Policy Unit (a Unit of the Department of Education and Skills, co-located with DCYA), and in some cases they were deemed to meet the criteria for the ECCE Contract in terms of qualifications for the purposes of the ECCE programme. In the early stages of the ECCE Programme to facilitate the early establishment of places, a flexible approach was taken to the qualification profile of staff. This may have resulted in qualifications being deemed acceptable that were less than ideal in terms of the required knowledge, skills and competence requirements of current qualifications in the early years.

In preparing the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications all decisions on the acceptability of these qualifications have been reviewed against a set of criteria including core knowledge and skills identified as essential for practice in Early Years settings. **As a result of this review, qualifications previously deemed acceptable by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, for the purposes of the ECCE Programme, may not continue to be acceptable for the purposes of the new Regulations or the DCYA Childcare Programmes Contracts.**

Please refer to Sections 1.2 and 1.3 above with regard to the list [DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications](#) and [DCYA Early Years Qualifications Recognition Application Process](#).

## **1.5 I have an international qualification, how can I find out if it is equivalent to the nationally accredited awards?**

The National Academy Recognition Centre (NARIC) Ireland provides advice on the academic recognition of an international qualification by comparing it, where possible, to a major award at a certain level on the Irish National Qualifications Framework (NFQ). If you hold an international qualification and wish to have it recognised in Ireland and wish to understand it in the context of the Irish qualifications system, you can refer to the NARIC Ireland Foreign Qualifications Database.

Recognition advice provided by NARIC Ireland does not represent right of access to employment, a regulated profession or education and training. If you have a foreign qualification that is recognised in Ireland but is not on the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications you will need to submit an application for DCYA Early Years Qualifications Recognition.

Please refer to Sections 1.2 and 1.3 above with regard to the list [DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications](#) and [DCYA Early Years Qualifications Recognition Application Process](#).

## **1.6 My qualification is not in early childhood care and education but I believe is relevant to practice in an early childhood setting. Will this qualification be recognised?**

Working with children in an early childhood care and education setting is a professional role with clear guidelines for practice expressed within national regulations and policy documents such as *Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and *Síolta the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (see [www.aistearsiolta.ie](http://www.aistearsiolta.ie)). Meeting these practice guidelines requires the achievement of core skills and knowledge including Child Development 0-6 years, Early Learning Theory and Practice, Child Health and Welfare 0-6yrs. These are mandatory content components of any course that claims to prepare professional practitioners for work in any early years setting. In addition, such courses should also contain a significant supervised practicum in early years settings to allow for the observation of the adult's capacity to interact appropriately with children and apply theoretical knowledge in practice. If your qualification does not meet all these content requirements it will not meet the requirements for recognition for the purposes of the Regulations or the DCYA Childcare Programmes Contracts.

If you wish to establish whether your existing award can gain you exemptions towards a recognised award you should contact an education and training institution delivering these programmes and they will be able to advise you further.

Detailed information on education and training providers can be found at [www.qualifax.ie](http://www.qualifax.ie)

## **1.7 I have many years of experience in running a pre-school, can this be taken into account instead of formal certificates?**

Whilst experience offers a valuable opportunity to learn and is an essential component of any professional education and training programme it is not a given that experience equals the achievement of skills and knowledge.

To be eligible to work within the Early Years Sector in Ireland you will be required to provide independent objective evidence that your learning has been assessed against established standards for the achievement of a relevant award recognised under the Regulations.

All education and training providers who deliver nationally accredited programmes of learning in Early Childhood Care and Education are required to have policies and procedures in place to allow for Recognition of Prior Learning and will be able to advise you further on how to progress towards achieving recognition for your experiential learning. For further information contact QQI [www.qqi.ie](http://www.qqi.ie).



## 2. DCYA Early Years Qualifications Recognition Application Process

### 2.1 Introduction

The new Early Years (Pre-school) Regulations which are being prepared will provide that every person working directly with children (with the exception of interns, students or volunteers) must hold a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ) or equivalent qualification.

The NFQ is a ten-level system (1–10) giving an academic or vocational value to qualifications obtained in Ireland. NFQ levels help indicate how an award can be used for training, education and employment opportunities. Each level is based on nationally agreed standards of what a learner is expected to know and be able to do after receiving an award. In recognition that the NFQ does not cover all qualifications that may be equivalent and/or suitably relevant to working with the early years pre-schools services in Ireland e.g. historic/legacy qualifications that pre-date the NFQ, international qualifications etc., the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has prepared a list of **DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications**<sup>3</sup> which will be used as the identifying list of acceptable qualifications for the purposes of meeting the requirements of the Regulations and DCYA Childcare Programmes Contracts. This list has been derived from a review of qualification certification submitted to the DCYA, in relation to staff already working in Early Years services on contract to deliver the ECCE Programme. In preparing the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications all decisions on the acceptability of these qualifications have been reviewed against a set of criteria including core knowledge and skills identified as essential for practice in Early Years settings. As a result of this review, qualifications previously deemed acceptable by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, for the purposes of the ECCE Programme, may not continue to be acceptable for the purposes of the new Regulations or the DCYA Childcare Programmes Contracts.

Where a qualification is **not published on the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications** but the holder considers it to be an appropriate Major Award at Level 5 on the NFQ or equivalent, the holder can apply (see DCYA Early Years Qualifications Recognition Application Process for details) to have their qualification assessed for

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<sup>3</sup>Having a qualification on the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications does not represent direct alignment/equivalency to Major Awards set out by QQI, right of access to employment, any other regulated profession other than Early Years Services in Ireland or education and training. Recognition decisions for the purposes of accessing further education and/or employment are made by education institutions, professional recognition bodies and employers.

approval. If it is approved for recognition the details of the qualification will be added<sup>4</sup> to the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications.

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<sup>4</sup>In some circumstances an individual's specific circumstances of qualification, or group of qualifications, may be deemed as suitable for recognition to meet the requirements of the Regulations and DCYA Childcare Programmes Contracts for that individual only and will not be added to the published list. In such cases the individual will receive a letter of approval from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs which will satisfy the requirements of the Early Years (Preschool) Regulations.

## 2.2 Application Requirements:

1. Complete the DCYA Early Years Qualification Recognition Application Form (Appendix 1);
2. Attach a copy of your qualification. **Please do not send in original qualification documents as the Department cannot take responsibility for returning original documents to applicants;**
3. If the qualification certificate does not identify the subject field of the course, please provide evidence from the education provider showing what field and subject the qualification has been granted in (e.g. a copy of the transcript of your final results);
4. Provide evidence of the modular breakdown of the course content and evidence that the content of the programme of learning leading to the award meets the content criteria specified by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Appendix 2). The more detailed the information that you can provide the better.

**All documentation must be in the English language (certified translation where required) before submission.**

**Please Note:**The DCYA reserves the right to request further supporting documentation to assist in the assessment process.

**N.B.** Failure to submit all application requirements in full may lead to your application being rejected and a requirement to start the application process again.

Completed applications can be submitted via email to: [eyqualifications@dcya.gov.ie](mailto:eyqualifications@dcya.gov.ie) or by post to:

**FREEPOST F5055  
Early Years Qualifications Recognition  
Department of Children and Youth Affairs,  
Early Years Policies and Programme Unit,  
43-49 Mespil Road,  
Dublin 4.  
D04YP52**

## 2.3 Application Process:

On application:

1. The DCYA will send a receipt of application with an application reference number
2. Applications will be examined:
  - a. If the application is deemed to be incomplete and with insufficient information the applicant will be informed that the application has been cancelled and a new application should be resubmitted.
  - b. If the application is deemed to have sufficient information the process of assessment will begin.
3. Applications will be assessed against the criteria required for early years qualification recognition, as determined by the DCYA, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills
  - If during the assessment process further supporting documentation is required the applicant will be requested to submit same indicating their application reference number.
4. An initial decision for approval or decline will be made.
5. The application and the initial decision will be put forward to an 'Early Years Qualifications Validation Advisory Group' for review.
6. The applicant will receive notification of the final decision which will consist of one of three decision options:

**Option 1:** Application for qualification recognition is approved and the qualification details will be added to the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications.

**Option 2:** Application for qualification recognition has been approved for specific individual purposes, will not be added to the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications and a certificate of approval will be issued to the applicant for evidence.

**Option 3:** Application for qualification recognition is declined and reason for decline.

## **2.4 Appeals Process**

Details in relation to the DCYA Early Years Qualifications Recognition Appeals Process will be provided in the near future.

## Appendix 1- DCYA Early Years Qualification Recognition Application Form

Where a qualification is not published on the list of **DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications** but the holder considers it to be an appropriate Major Award at Level 5 on the NFQ or equivalent can apply to have their qualification assessed for approval.

Completed applications can be submitted via **Email to: [eyqualifications@dcya.gov.ie](mailto:eyqualifications@dcya.gov.ie)** or by post to:

**FREEPOST F5055**  
**Early Years Qualifications Recognition**  
**Department of Children and Youth Affairs,**  
**Early Years Policies and Programme Unit,**  
**43-49 Mespil Road,**  
**Dublin 4.**  
**D04YP52**

### Applicant Details:

First Name (in BLOCK CAPITALS)	Surname (in BLOCK CAPITALS)	Maiden Name (if applicable)																				
Date of Birth	PPS Number																					
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Postal Address(in BLOCK CAPITALS)	
Address Line 1 :	
Address Line 2:	
Address Line 3:	
Address Line 4:	
County:	
Country:	
Eircode:	
Email Address:	
Home Phone Number:	
Mobile Phone Number:	

Ensure you complete qualifications details and checklist on page 2 also.

### Qualification Details (in BLOCK CAPITALS)

<b>Award Title (title of qualification to be assessed) – If multiple please submit separately.</b>	
<b>Education/Training Provider</b>	
<b>Course Code (where applicable)</b>	
<b>Awarding Body</b>	
<b>Country in which course was completed</b>	

<b>Please tick checklist as appropriate</b>	<b>Tick</b>
<b>5.</b> Application Form details completed in FULL.	
<b>6.</b> Copy of your qualification certificate attached. <b>Please do not send in original qualification documents as the Department cannot take responsibility for returning original documents to applicants.</b>	
<b>7.</b> If the qualification certificate does not identify the subject field of the course, evidence from the education provider showing what field and subject the qualification has been granted in (e.g. a copy of the transcript of your final results) is attached.	
<b>8.</b> Evidence of the modular breakdown of the course content and evidence that the content of the programme of learning leading to the award meets the content criteria specified by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Early Years (Pre-school) Regulations and DCYA Childcare Programmes Qualification Requirements and DCYA Qualifications Recognition Application Process document (Appendix 2). The more detailed the information that you can provide the better. <b>All documentation must be in the English language (certified translation where required) before submission.</b>	

**Please Note:** The DCYA reserves the right to request further supporting documentation to assist in the assessment process.

**N.B.** Failure to submit all application requirements in full may lead to your application being rejected and a requirement to start the application process again.

The DCYA in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills reserves the right to determine the relevance of the content of the award for the purpose of meeting the requirements.

**On receipt of this application form, a letter of receipt with a unique reference number will be issued to you. You should use this reference number in any contact you have with us in regard to your application.**

If you are currently working in a service the letter must be kept on site and made available for inspection and compliance purposes.

I understand that the information provided by me will be used by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (in conjunction with the Department of Education and the Early Years Qualifications Validation Advisory Group) to assess the suitability of the qualification(s) stated to be recognised as a DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualification.

<b>Applicant Signature:</b>		<b>Date of Application:</b>	
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## Appendix 2- Criteria for Early Years Qualification Recognition

Working with children in an early childhood care and education setting is a professional role with clear guidelines for practice expressed within national regulations and policy documents such as *Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and *Síolta the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (see [www.aistearsiolta.ie](http://www.aistearsiolta.ie)).

Meeting these practice guidelines requires the achievement of core skills and knowledge including

- Child Development 0-6 years,
- Early Learning Theory and Practice,
- Child Health and Welfare 0-6yrs.

These are mandatory content components of any course that claims to prepare professional practitioners for work in any early years setting.

In addition, such courses should also contain

- a significant supervised practicum in early years settings to allow for the observation of the adult's capacity to interact appropriately with children and apply theoretical knowledge in practice.

Further details in relation to the criteria for Early Years Qualification recognition will be included in the near future.