



Subject Benchmark Statement: Early Childhood Studies

The Basics

This document is a summary of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Early Childhood Studies (ECS). It is specifically designed to provide a short and accessible overview of the main Statement for students, employers and academics. It is not intended to replace or alter the Subject Benchmark Statement, which should be referred to in the design and approval of courses and when any further detail is required.

Subject Benchmark Statements describe the nature of study and the benchmark academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and in respect of particular qualifications. They provide a picture of what graduates in a particular subject might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their course or programme.

Subject Benchmark Statements are presented in four sections. Section 1 outlines the contextual information – providing the operational landscape, and boundaries, of subject discipline. This includes consideration of the ways in which the discipline addresses wider social goals, specifically in relation to: equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); the requirements of disabled students; education for sustainable development (ESD); and enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Section 2 covers distinctive features of the course, including curriculum design, partnership arrangements, flexibility of delivery, progression and ongoing monitoring processes. Section 3 explains any features relevant to teaching, learning and assessment activities for the subject. Section 4 describes the benchmark standards of achievement reached by all graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours in the subject, with some subjects also including achievement at master's level.



Why study a degree in Early Childhood Studies?

Early childhood studies is an established discipline focusing on the holistic development of infants and young children from conception to the age of eight. Early childhood studies draws upon research and professional practice from health, education, social work, psychology, sociology, philosophy, history, cultural studies, legal studies, politics, economics and neuroscience. Early Childhood Studies degrees enable graduates to progress to a wide range of professional roles.

Over the last three decades, graduates have contributed to the development of early childhood policy and research. Its graduate workforce has taken on management and leadership roles and many are employed in a wide range of associate professions in education, health and social work; and/or are continuing with postgraduate studies. In whatever capacity they work, ECS graduates' breadth of knowledge means they are well placed to advocate for babies and young children, their families and the early childhood professions. They facilitate the right of children to actively participate in their world, recognising each child and all children's uniqueness. Their knowledge enables them to advocate for young children's needs, voice, rights, development and learning while celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion.



What are the main teaching and learning approaches in early childhood studies?

Students develop knowledge, understanding and analysis of the processes that shape multiple early childhoods and children's lives in a way that fosters critical evaluation. This is supported by presenting multiple perspectives, drawing on a range of subject areas. This includes an understanding of the contested and changing nature of the concept of childhood, ethical principles and children's rights, both locally, nationally and globally, and the philosophies, beliefs and attitudes that inform them. Active engagement in research and enquiry are significant parts of ECS. This entails students developing critical awareness and the ability to reflect upon self and others. Students gain a critical understanding of the processes and methodological and ethical debates required to conduct and complete research. They are encouraged to develop the reflexivity necessary to explore the political, cultural, social and economic factors embedded in research and practice.

Approaches to teaching and learning include opportunities for students to plan for provision that ensures children's health, welfare and safety needs are met and promoted, taking account of the conditions that enable them to flourish. Students are enabled to develop their own cultural competence, valuing cultural identity as well as being provided with opportunities to lead, support and work collaboratively with others. They have a strong understanding of co-production with children, parents, carers and other professionals.



How are students assessed?

The assessment of Early Childhood Studies courses includes a mix of methods that are accessible to all students.

Where individual students may be disadvantaged by particular assessment methods, adjustments to those assessments are considered, while ensuring fairness across the full cohort. The procedures used for assessment cover the subject knowledge, abilities and skills developed through the degree course. The choice of assessment methods is clearly related to the learning objectives and enables students to demonstrate theoretical, subject-specific and generic skills and their understanding of the ways in which they complement and enrich each other. Assessment reflects the critical pedagogy of the degrees and is wide-ranging - from essays, presentations, academic reports and critical reflections to real-life projects, engaging with employers.



Benchmark Standards

The minimum threshold, typical, excellent and postgraduate standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded a degree in Early Childhood Studies are outlined on **pages 19–26** of the Subject Benchmark Statement. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be and should refer to [Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees](#). This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours: 1st, 2:1, 2:2 and 3rd. Study at master's level requires higher level skills, with students expected to achieve according to the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7 on the FHEQ and SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS.

The Statement was developed by a group of subject experts drawn from across the sector. Details of the Advisory Group can be found on **page 29** of the Statement.

Read the full Subject Benchmark Statement

The [full Subject Benchmark Statement](#) is available on the QAA website.



Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as a membership organisation on behalf of the higher education sector.

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