

1 minute guide: Ratios and Qualifications

Early year's qualifications and recruitment- Guidance for Setting Managers/Owner's and Childminders.

Why have we written this guidance?

We are receiving a high number of queries relating to staff qualifications and difficulties in recruiting qualified staff. Some of you may be looking at other levels of qualification and need clarification around what the staff member can do within their setting and if they can be included within the staff: child ratio.

As always, these things never have a straightforward answer but to help you with your queries we have put together some guidance and key considerations to enable you to make informed decisions and ensure you are meeting the EYFS requirements.

Please also see the EYFS requirements here:

[EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers](#)

Qualification requirements in Group based providers

The DfE defines the qualifications that staff must hold to count in EYFS staff: child ratios.

The level 3 qualification **must** be an approved qualification as outlined within the following DfE document [Check an early years qualification - GOV.UK](#)

Level 2 qualifications awarded from 1 September 2014 until 31 August 2019 are not shown in the qualification tracker. All level 2 early years qualifications are full and relevant if they are: early years (0 to 5 years) related and appropriate to early years practice.

Ratios

The EYFS requirements states the minimum number of adults needed to supervise children based on the number of children and their age. They also specify the minimum qualification levels required within the ratios.

In settings (3.44-3.55) on the early years register, the **manager of the setting must hold an approved qualification at level 3 or above and at least half of all other staff must hold at least an approved level 2 qualification**. An approved qualification is defined by the Department for Education as meeting the criteria set out in the [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#) document.

Suitable students on long term placements and volunteers (aged 17 or over) and staff working as apprentices in early education (aged 16 or over) may be included in the ratios at the level below their level of study, if the provider is satisfied that they are competent and responsible.

Where someone with QTS, EYPS or EYTS is working directly with three and four year old children you can use a ratio of 1:13 where there is also a level 3 working with the children. E.g. 1 EYTS and 1 Level 3 could have 26 three and four year olds.

Key considerations

- All staff who obtained a level 2 and/or level 3 qualification since 30 June 2016 must obtain a PFA qualification within three months of starting work in order to be included in the required staff: child ratios at level 2 or level 3 in an early years setting.
- Remember certificates should be checked to ensure they are suitable **before** the applicant is appointed into the position- don't get caught out by this
- The ratios and supervision levels given within the EYFS (1:3, 1:5, 1:8, 1:13) are the **minimum** staffing requirements. The number of children may need to be adjusted to account for the total number of children in the nursery or the behaviour and abilities of the children attending.
- Only staff who have completed QTS, EYPS or EYTS can be included in the 1:13 ratio.
- Do not forget your safeguarding requirements when accepting students/apprentices/ volunteers. I.e. They should not be left alone with the children, change nappies alone or have overall responsibility for any children.
- Ensure you have sufficient staff to supervise mealtimes and at least 1 member of staff hold a full and relevant Paediatric First Aid certificate.
- Do you have sufficient staff to provide adequate supervision of indoor and outdoor areas?
- Do your staffing levels allow for staff breaks, absences or training? E.g., Can you remain in ratio if you lose a level 3?
- Do you have a robust risk assessment in place to highlight how you have ensure your staffing levels are meeting the requirements as set out in the EYFS?
- A student/apprentice may be included in ratios if you are satisfied, they are competent. Think about how you would evidence you have reached this decision. Supervision notes/ observations perhaps?
- If recruiting a higher proportion of level 2 / unqualified staff, have you considered how this would impact on the quality of the setting and identified steps you will take to minimise this. Do you have the right balance of experienced vs inexperienced staff?

The Early Years Inclusion team is always available to offer support and advice to support your decision-making processes but remember you are the experts when it comes to your setting, staff and children- not us. There will always be lots of other variables that you need to consider. We have provided an example below to demonstrate how the minimum requirements will not always be sufficient to remain compliant throughout the day.

Example:

The Early Years Inclusion team is always available to offer support and advice to support your decision-making processes but remember you are the experts when it comes to your setting, staff and children- not us.

The manager of setting has a relevant level 6 qualification but **does not** work directly with the children.

The setting is split into three separate rooms where the children in each room **are out of sight and sound from the other rooms.**

Baby Room: 10 children

2-Year-old room: 15 children

3+ room: 20 children

Baby Room- Min requirements

1 x level 3, 2 x Level 2, + 1 other staff member
(apprentice/level2/level3)



2yr room- Min requirements

1 x level 3, 2 x Level 2,

3+ room- Min requirements

1 x level 3, 2 x Level 2

Scenario:

- 1x level 3 member of staff in the baby room is breastfeeding and needs to take regular breaks to express her milk.
- A child in the 2-year-old room is struggling to settle and is requiring more intensive support from his keyworker who is a level 2.
- In order to answer the door when parents arrive a staff member is required to leave the room.
- All staff are working more than 6 hours and therefore will need a lunch break.

Solution:

- ✓ **At least** one more level 3 practitioner is required to release the level 3's from ratio for lunch breaks/expressing. Consider what you would do should a level 3 go off sick? Perhaps a minimum of 2 more level 3's would have less risk.
- ✓ Ensure there is at least one more level 2 above the minimum requirements to enable staff to provide children more specialised support when required and to leave the room when necessary.

Therefore, it is advisable that the minimum staffing to meet minimum requirements at all times would be:

5x Level 3's

6 x level 2's

2 x (apprentice/Level 2's)

This is two level 3's above the minimum requirements.

Childminders

Ratio requirements for childminders and staff.

Please also see the EYFS requirements here:

[Early years foundation stage statutory framework for childminders](#) please read information from 3.47-3.57

What does the EYFS state:

3.49 The ratio requirements below apply to the total number of people available to work directly with children. Exceptionally, and where the quality of care and safety and security of children is maintained, changes to the ratios may be made, but childminders cannot have more than six children under the age of eight per person providing care.

Key considerations

Child Safety and Wellbeing

- The primary concern must always be the safety, supervision, and welfare of all children.
- Ensure that individual needs (e.g. medical, emotional, developmental) can still be met effectively.

Justifiable Circumstances

Exceptions may be allowed for:

- Siblings being cared for together.
- Childminder's own children.
- Temporary changes, such as school holidays or emergencies.
- These must be clearly documented and not used routinely.

Parental Agreement

- Parents must be informed and give written consent where appropriate.
- Transparency builds trust and ensures accountability.

Impact on Quality of Care

Consider whether increasing the number of children affects:

- Interaction quality.
- Learning and development opportunities.
- Emotional support and supervision.

Environment and Resources

- Is the physical space safe and suitable for more children?
- Are there enough toys, learning materials, and sleeping areas?

Support and Staffing

If using assistants, ensure they:

Are suitably trained and vetted.

- Understand safeguarding and EYFS requirements.
- Maintain clear roles and responsibilities.

Documentation and Monitoring

Keep records of:

- When and why exceptions were made.
- How risks were assessed and mitigated.
- Regularly **review and evaluate** the impact of exceptions.

Regulatory Compliance

- Ensure exceptions align with Section 3 of the EYFS 2025 statutory framework
- Be prepared for Ofsted inspections and provide evidence of safe practice. If Ofsted feels that you are not meeting the needs of all children and safety is compromised, they may deem you to be over ratio.

