Best Practice Network

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From SENCO to Speech & Language Champion

From SENCO to Speech and Language specialism



You have already built a strong foundation in supporting children with SEND through your Early Years SENCO Level 3.

The **Early Years Speech & Language Support Practitioner Apprenticeship** is a Level 5 programme that develops early years practitioners and setting support staff into confident speech and language champions. It equips them with the skills to identify speech, language and communication needs, remove barriers and help children access early learning, play and development.

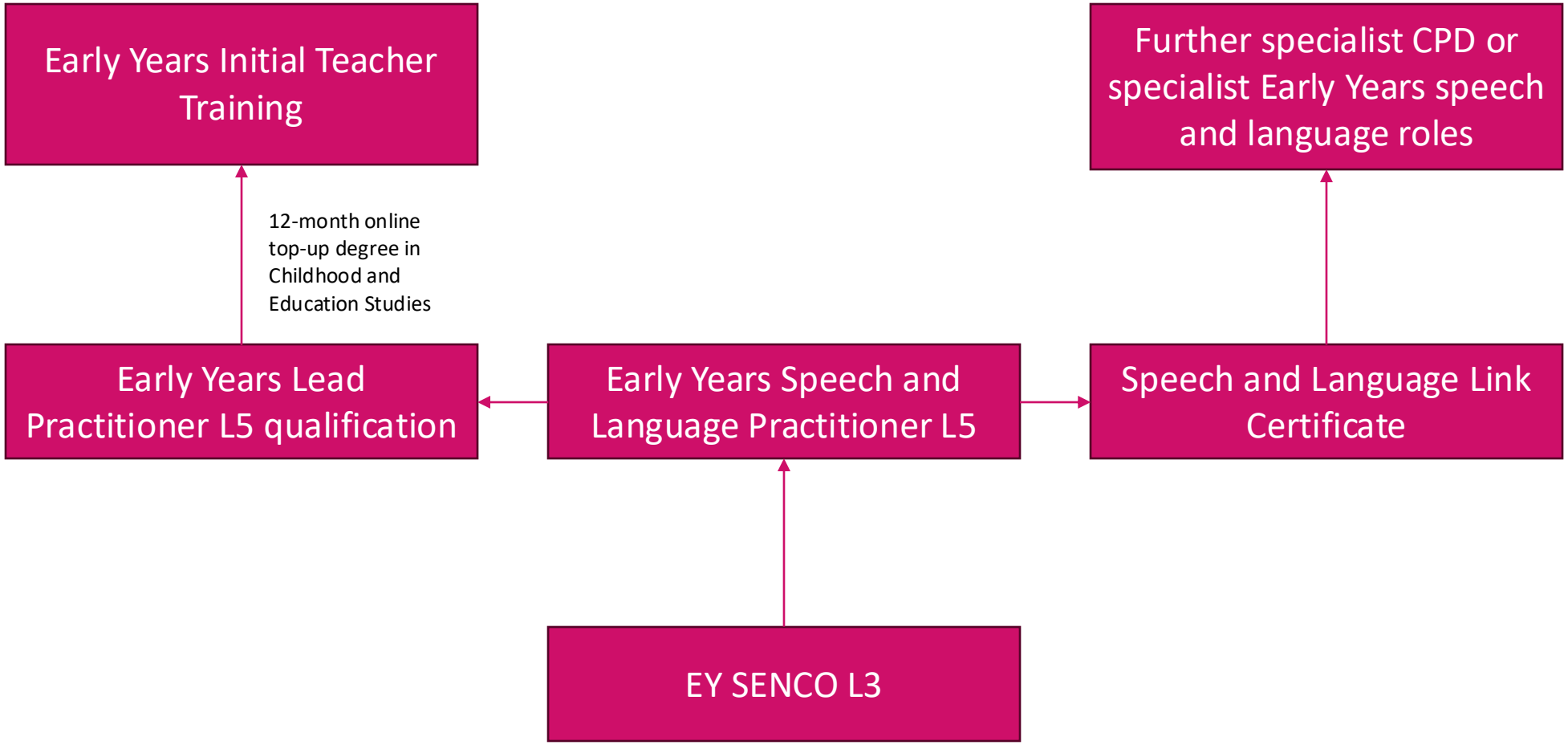
Key points

- Nature next step to build on your existing SEND knowledge and develop a specialist speech and language focus
- Level 5 apprenticeship for early years practitioners
- Awards Speech & Language Link Certification and Early Years Lead Practitioner Level 5
- Up to 21-month programme
- Delivered with qualified speech and language therapists
- Designed for practitioners, room leaders and setting support staff
- Builds confident speech and language champions
- Supports early identification, inclusion and better outcomes
- Fully funded through the Growth and Skills Levy

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Where can this programme take you?



Developed with Speech & Language Link

This programme is delivered in partnership with Speech & Language Link, combining specialist expertise in speech and language with Best Practice Network's experience in designing and delivering high-quality training and apprenticeships.

Speech & Language Link are recognised experts in supporting children and young people with speech, language and communication needs, bringing evidence-informed approaches and practical strategies that are used in schools and early years settings every day. Their involvement ensures learners benefit from direct input from qualified speech and language therapists, grounded in real classroom application.

Why this partnership matters

- Recognised specialists in speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)
- Direct input from qualified speech and language therapists
- Evidence-informed approaches grounded in real early years practice
- Practical strategies learners can apply immediately in their settings
- Specialist expertise in identifying communication needs and removing barriers
- Helps practitioners create communication-supportive and inclusive environments
- Supports earlier identification, effective intervention and stronger outcomes
- Combines clinical expertise with Best Practice Network's proven apprenticeship delivery

How is the programme delivered?

The Early Years Speech & Language Support Practitioner Apprenticeship is delivered through a structured blend of:

- Facilitated virtual classrooms
- Monthly coaching
- Tutor reviews
- Online resources
- Workplace learning

This allows participants to build specialist knowledge while applying their learning directly in their school setting.



The role of the Apprenticeship Tutor

A key benefit of the programme is the dedicated apprenticeship tutor. Learners are not expected to work through the programme alone. Their tutor provides regular support, guidance and coaching, helping them connect the learning to real pupils, real provision and the day-to-day challenges they may face in school.

- Provides regular one-to-one guidance and coaching
- Helps learners apply specialist speech and language-informed strategies in their setting
- Supports progress against the apprenticeship standard
- Guides portfolio development and evidence collection
- Helps learners reflect on impact and improve practice
- Works with the learner and employer to keep progress on track





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Curriculum modules

- Study skills and reflective practice
- Inclusion, ethics and rights based approaches
- A unique child
- Child development
- Legislation, policy and practice
- Curriculum intent, implementation and impact
- Theories of learning
- Pedagogy in practice
- Exciting and enabling environments
- Effective development of health and wellbeing
- Leadership practice – theories and concepts
- Partnerships and multi-agency work
- Boundaries and safety of information
- Preparation for apprenticeship assessment

Speech & Language-specific learning

Module 1 - What is SLCN?

- Build your understanding of Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)
- Learn the key terminology used by speech and language professionals
- Gain an overview of common speech, language and communication difficulties and diagnoses encountered in early years settings
- Discover how common SLCN is and why early identification matters
- Explore the wide-ranging impact of SLCN on children's development, learning, and life chances

Module 2 – Typical Development of Speech and Language Skills

- Discover how attention and listening skills develop and how they support the development of communication and learning
- Gain practical tips to support children's attention and listening skills throughout the day
- Explore typical speech and language development in the early years
- Understand the skills involved in processing language and recognise the impact of communication breakdowns

Speech & Language-specific learning

Module 3 - Creating a Communication Supportive Environment in the Early Years Setting

- Learn how to create communication friendly environments where every child can thrive
- Discover how a whole - setting approach can support all children's communication development
- Explore simple, practical changes that can make a big difference to communication and interaction
- Discover effective strategies to support children's speech, language, and communication skills
- Explore fun activities to help support speech sound development in the early years

Module 4 – Identifying SLCN and Taking Action

- Learn how to spot the early signs of speech, language, and communication difficulties.
- Build confidence in identifying potential speech sound and language development needs.
- Explore the important link between communication and behaviour.
- Explore the differences between SLCN and EAL and how to support multilingual children effectively.
- Understand the next steps when concerns arise, from monitoring and family partnership to specialist referrals.

Support every step of the way

At Best Practice Network, we believe every learner has the potential to succeed. Whether someone has additional learning needs, needs help with organisation or has not completed formal training for a while, support is built into the apprenticeship from the start.

Personalised learner support

Support is tailored to each participant's needs, and learners can ask for help at any point during the programme.

Dedicated tutor guidance

Tutors check progress regularly, identify barriers early and help learners stay confident and on track.

Additional Learning Support

A specialist ALS team is available for learners who need extra support, strategies or reasonable adjustments.

Wellbeing and confidence

Learners are supported with both their development and wellbeing, with regular check-ins and open communication.

Support in the workplace

Mentors are involved so participants can apply their learning effectively in their setting.

Could this be your next step?

From Early Years SENCO to Speech and Language Champion

If you want to build on your SEND knowledge and specialise further in speech, language and communication, this programme could be a strong fit.

To join the programme, you will also need to:

- Hold a Level 3 Early Years Educator qualification, equivalent qualification or have extensive relevant experience
- Have been resident in the UK for the last three years
- Be working and interacting daily with children from birth to age 5 with knowledge up to 8
- Work in a setting delivering the EYFS learning and development requirements

Please note: childminders are not eligible for this apprenticeship.

Build on your Early Years SENCO knowledge

Move from broad SEND knowledge into a focused specialism

Deepen your understanding of speech, language and communication development and needs.

Strengthen your leadership practice

Work towards the Early Years Lead Practitioner Level 5 qualification while developing specialist expertise.

Identify communication needs earlier

Build confidence in recognising SLCN and knowing what action to take.

Bring practical strategies back to your setting

Support attention, listening, understanding, talking, interaction and inclusive practice.

Become a speech and language champion

Help strengthen consistent support across practitioners, families and external professionals.

Benefits for Early Years settings

Build in-house speech and language expertise

Develop existing practitioners into confident speech and language champions who can apply practical strategies across the setting.

Strengthen inclusive provision

Help children with speech, language and communication needs access learning, play, routines and relationships more fully.

Improve consistency of support

Create a more joined-up approach between practitioners, room leaders, SENCOs, families and external professionals.

Support earlier identification

Equip staff to recognise possible communication needs sooner and respond with practical, evidence-informed support.

Reduce pressure on leaders and SENCOs

Develop practitioners who can contribute more confidently to observations, planning, adaptations and targeted support.

Make effective use of Growth and Skills Levy funding

Use levy funding to build specialist capacity within the setting without relying solely on existing training budgets.

How to apply

1. Apply online
Participants complete a short application through the Best Practice Network website.

2. We arrange the funding
Our friendly funding team will support the employer and manage the funding process.

3. Start with full support
Participants receive induction, onboarding and guidance before beginning the programme.

Funding

- Participants never pay a penny
- The £9,000 cost is funded by the Growth and Skills Levy (for eligible employers)
- Eligible apprentices between 16-24 can have 100% of their training and assessment costs funded
- Non levy employers can access government co-investment towards training costs (5%)
- For apprentices aged 25 and over, government funding is still available, with the employer contribution depending on levy status

Any Questions?