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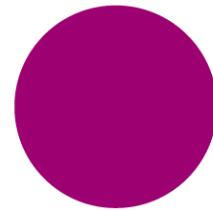
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# Early Years 2026: Funding, pathways and what it means for your setting



# Agenda

## What we will focus on today

- What has changed in Early Years this year
- What it means for your team and your setting
- Where settings are feeling the most pressure right now
- Practical ways to develop staff and strengthen your team
- What support is available and how to use it



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# Staffing Challenges in Early Years

- **High Staff Turnover**  
Frequent staff changes disrupt children's learning and team dynamics.
- **Retention Struggles**  
Team members lack clear progression routes and often leave the sector altogether.
- **Recruitment Costs**  
Advertising, interviewing and onboarding all take time and money.
- **Lost Time**  
New staff need training, but it pulls focus from day-to-day operations.
- **Changing Regulations**  
Navigating qualifications, ratios and funding is increasingly complex.
- **Balancing Budgets**  
Limited funding makes it hard to invest in CPD without guaranteed ROI.



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# Early Years Training

A Full Career Pathway for Your Team



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# What most settings are trying to figure out

- How do I keep good staff?
- How do I build future leaders?
- How do I support children with increasing needs?
- Where do I even start with training?



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# Benefits of our Early Years training



- Up to 100% funded training that fits your setting and your budget
- Develop confident, capable practitioners who excel and stay in their roles
- Attract fresh talent and build a stronger, more skilled team
- Learning is applied directly in the workplace for immediate impact
- Boost staff retention, motivation and confidence
- Access free recruitment support to fill staffing gaps

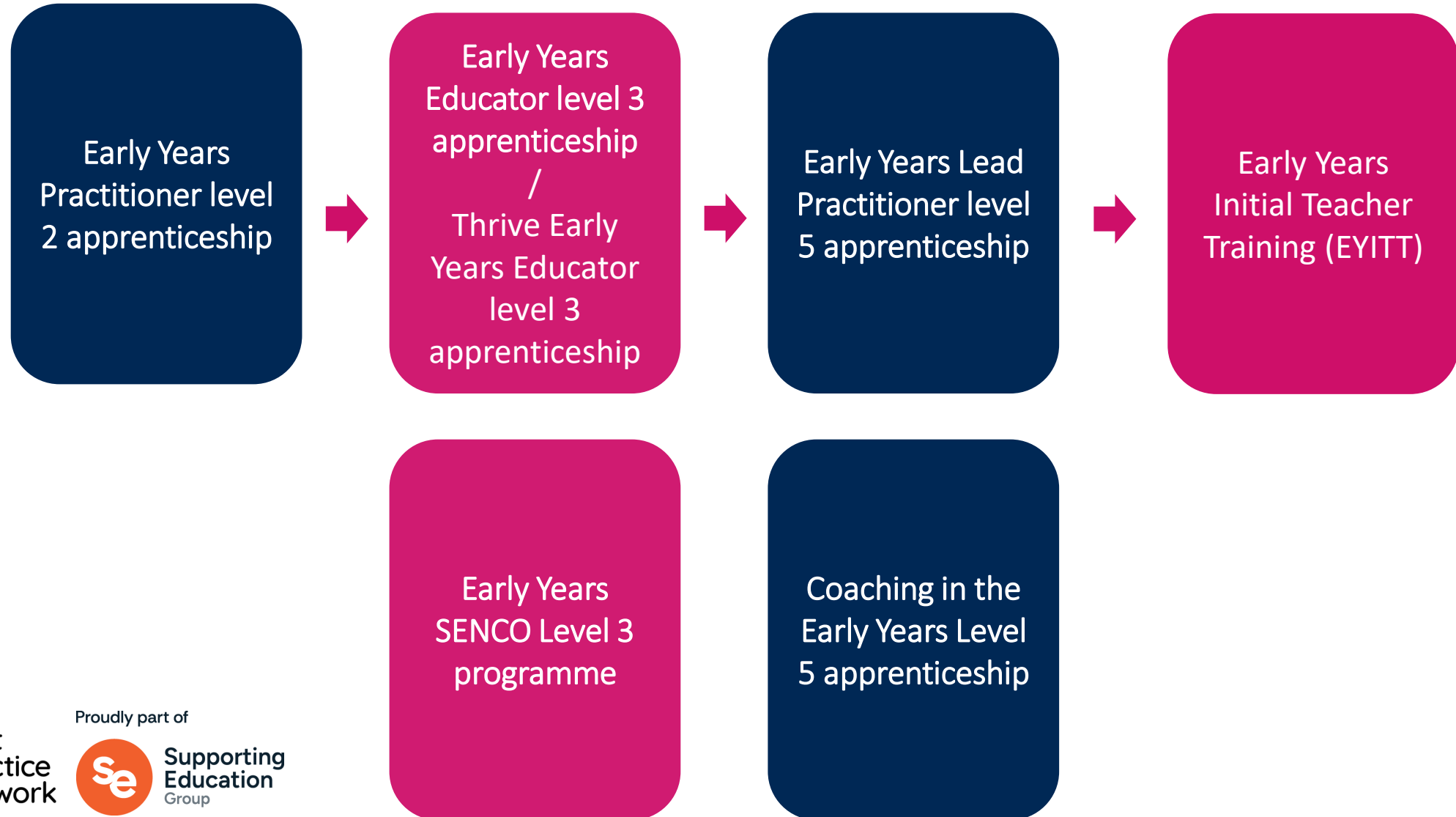


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# Early Years Progression route



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# For team members who are new to Early Years or just starting out: Early Years Practitioner level 2 apprenticeship

- 12-month programme + 3 months EPA (for full time learner)
- Functional skills maths and English L1 required if apprentice does not already have equivalent qualifications (mandatory for 16–18-year-olds)
- Ideal for learners who are new to an early years setting/the workplace or not ready for level 3
- Consists of 9 core modules, including child development, health and safety, safeguarding and purposeful play & assessment
- EPA methods: observation and a professional discussion underpinned by a portfolio of evidence



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# For team members who are ready to take on more responsibility: Early Years Educator level 3 apprenticeship



- 15 month programme + 3 months EPA (for full time learner – minimum duration 12 months)
- Fully recognised and supports meeting ratio requirements for EYEL3 in an EY setting
- Functional skills maths and English L2 (mandatory for 16-18 year olds)
- Learners will need to complete paediatric first aid and submit their certificate as part of their apprenticeship
- Consists of 11 modules + end point assessment preparation – including safeguarding, H&S, child development, a unique child, enabling environments and teaching, learning & assessment
- End point assessment methods – observation and questioning, professional discussion and portfolio of evidence

## For EY SENCO's or educators who are due to take up the role: Early Years SENCO Level 3 programme

- 6-month programme designed for educators in Early Years settings
- Fully funded by the Department for Education, with limited places available
- Develop confidence in identifying needs and planning effective support
- Strengthen communication with families and external professionals
- Support a more consistent, inclusive approach across your setting



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## For team members who are stepping into leadership or supporting others: Early Years Lead Practitioner level 5 apprenticeship

- 18-month programme + 3 months apprenticeship assessment
- Designed for those in a leadership role in an EY setting
- Functional skills maths and English L2 (mandatory for 16–18-year-old apprentices)
- Delivered in cohorts
- 16 virtual classroom sessions
- Fully recognised qualification in line with the EYFS



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## For team members who support others and build stronger team practice: Coaching in the Early Years Apprenticeship Level 5

- Gain the ILM Level 5 Certificate in Effective Coaching and Mentoring
- Designed for EY leaders, practitioners, and support staff who guide others
- Develop structured, high-quality coaching skills specific to Early Years
- Must have an EY qualification prerequisite
- Apply structured approaches like GROW and solution-focused coaching to support colleagues working in play-based, child-led environments



# For graduates in your team who are ready to become Early Years Teachers: Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT)



- 12-month, fully funded route to Early Years Teacher Status
- Covers the full birth to 5 age range
- Develop high-quality teaching and learning across your setting
- Build leadership capability within your team
- Structured support for both the trainee and your setting, including tutor and mentor guidance

*While they are training, there is structured support in place for both the trainee and your setting, so you're developing someone within your team without having to manage it all alone.*



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# What this means for your setting

- You can build a clear progression route for your team, not just one-off training
- You can develop staff at various levels, from new starters to future leaders
- You can strengthen support in key areas like SEND and team development
- You can grow your own talent instead of relying only on recruitment
- You can create a more stable, confident team over time



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# What is Off-The-Job Training



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# Training That Fits Your Budget

Up to 100% funded - and we'll guide  
you through every step.



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# Funding

## What is the levy fund?

The English apprentice levy fund is controlled by the Department for Education and was created as a long-term funding solution for companies to hire and train apprentices.

Our apprenticeship programmes qualify for funding from the English apprentice levy fund. Best Practice Network provides support to candidates and their employers to access this funding.

For guidance on how the funding routes apply to your setting, speak to one of our apprenticeship experts on +44 (0) 117 920 9428 or email [enquiries@bestpracticenet.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@bestpracticenet.co.uk)

## Enrol your employees

Employers should contact Best Practice Network via [enquiries@bestpracticenet.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@bestpracticenet.co.uk) to reserve a place on the required programme.

We will then support you with gathering all necessary information, recruitment, registering with Apprenticeship Service Account and funding applications.

## £ Funding routes

**If your setting contributes to the apprenticeship levy fund**

Levy paying employers can access their fund contributions through their **Apprenticeship Service Account**. You can use this service to manage the funds you have available for apprenticeship training in England.

**If your setting does not contribute to the apprenticeship levy fund**

You pay 5% towards the cost of the training for your apprentice. The remaining 95% will be paid by the government.

**Apprenticeship levy transfer**

Employers with unspent funds can transfer up to 25% of that contribution to another employer. That means you can benefit from the levy contributions of a different organisation to cover the full costs of an apprenticeship for your setting.

## If your setting has fewer than 250 employees:

From August 2026, you will receive **100% of the funding from Government** if the apprentice is under 25 when they start, so you will not need to make the 5% contribution.

Employers will receive an additional **£1000** where the apprentice is between 16 and 18 years old. From **October 2026** this will increase to **£2,000**

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# Programmes cost and funding breakdown

	Original Cost	Maintained Nurseries	Nurseries with Apprenticeship Levy	All other Settings
<b>Early Years Practitioner level 2 apprenticeship</b>	£5,000	100% Funded	100% Funded	95% Funded, Setting pay £250 in total, £21 x 12 months
<b>Early Years Educator level 3 apprenticeship</b>	£7,000	100% Funded	100% Funded	95% Funded, Setting pay £350 in total, £24 x 15 months
<b>Early Years Lead Practitioner level 5 apprenticeship</b>	£9,000	100% Funded	100% Funded	95% Funded, Setting pay £450 in total, £25 x 18 months
<b>Coaching in the Early Years Apprenticeship Level 5</b>	£5,000	100% Funded	100% Funded	95% Funded, Setting pay £250 in total, £28 x 9 months
<b>Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT)</b>	Fully Funded by DfE	Fully Funded by DfE	Fully Funded by DfE	Fully Funded by DfE



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# What this means for your setting

- More flexibility to bring in new staff at foundation level
- A clearer route for under 25s to progress into Level 3 and Level 5 roles
- Strengthen your staff: child ratios while developing your team
- Build future leaders from within your setting
- Grow your team in a more structured and sustainable way

*This change is not just about funding, it gives you more room to bring people in, develop them properly and build your future team from within.*



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# Apprenticeship Recruitment Service

Matching you with the best talents



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# How does it work?

Our free Apprenticeship Recruitment Service connects early years settings with enthusiastic learners, bringing fresh talent into the sector while helping apprentices find the perfect place to grow and thrive.



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# How do we support settings?



If you need support with staffing, our recruitment team will work with you to find the best apprentices for your vacancy.

We can:

- **Advertise** - Your vacancy will be placed on our website, job boards as well as the Find and Apply website
- **Screening** - We hold initial calls with all applicants to assess their eligibility and suitability for the apprenticeship
- **Shortlisting** - We will contact you with a pool of applicants with notes for you to interview
- **Training** - Once you have chosen the perfect candidate(s), we will enrol them onto the next intake of our apprenticeship programme



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# How do we support apprentices?

- We conduct a screening call with every applicant to understand what kind of setting would suit them best and to check their eligibility.
- We check our current vacancies and discuss suitable options.
- We offer support on how to approach local settings if we do not have suitable vacancies.
- CV sharing with matching settings.
- Matched candidates are offered an interview at the setting (stay and play/work trial).
- If no placement offered: we continue the search for an employer and supply feedback



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# Real Voices from Real Settings

What makes us stand out



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# What Our Partners Say



*"It's the most practical and supportive training we've had. Our team has grown stronger and day-to-day operations have become smoother."*

**Jane, Head of Toddlers at Snapdragons Nursery**



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# Why partner with Best Practice Network

## Support Every Step of the Way

A fully managed service – from recruitment to training, with dedicated support for both employers and learners.

## Learner-First Approach

We put the needs of each apprentice at the heart of everything we do.

## Expert Tutors

Our experienced tutors empower learners to achieve their best, grow in confidence and make a real impact in their settings.

## Flexible, Funded Training

With up to 100% funding available, our team helps you access the right support. We will find a solution that fits your goals and your budget.



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Funded by  
  
Department  
for Education



# Why We are Different

Common Issues with Other Providers	How We Do Things Differently	What It Means for You
High tutor turnover disrupts consistency	Much lower staff turnover in our team	Reliable, stable support from start to finish
Overloaded tutors (60+ learners)	Avg. 45 learners per tutor	More personalised support, better learner outcomes
Mostly online-only delivery	Regular in-person visits and coaching	Practical, embedded learning that sticks
Curriculum feels disconnected from nursery life	Content mapped to real-world practice	Immediate value in your setting
Weak recruitment and screening	Rigorous vetting and matching process	Apprentices who fit and commit
No clear progression beyond the course	Full pathway to EYITT and leadership	Retain talent and develop your next leaders
Cold, transactional relationship	People-first, values-driven culture	A trusted, long-term training partner

*We're not just a provider — we're a partner who grows with your setting.*



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# What you can do next

- Review your current team this week
- Identify 2-3 staff for progression
- Think about where you need support most
- If helpful, book a 1 on 1 call now and we can map this with you



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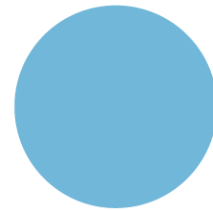


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## Q&A

Please feel free to put your questions in  
the Q&A box now!





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## Ready to Strengthen Your Team?

We'd love to partner with you — to grow your team, your setting, and the future of Early Years education.

### **Our team will be in touch shortly**

We'll follow up to answer any questions and explore what's possible.

### **Want to speak sooner?**

Book a 1-to-1 conversation here.



[bestpracticenet.co.uk](https://bestpracticenet.co.uk)

Learn. Share. Grow.