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## Consultation Response: Experience-Based Route for Early Years Practitioners

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## The Bell Foundation's response to the consultation on experience-based route for early years practitioners

**To what extent do you agree that a practitioner who has completed the experience-based route, must also hold a suitable Level 2 English qualification before they can be counted in the staff:child ratios at Level 3?**

- Strongly agree ☒
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

**Is there anything else you think the Department for Education should consider in its design of the experience-based route?**

The Foundation is concerned that the qualifications listed in the suitable Level 2 English qualifications of the Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards document (2024) have been created for learners with English as a first language, and that Level 2 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) qualifications and suitable International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores are not recognised. This omission discriminates competent fluent individuals with relevant early years foundation stage (EYFS) experience who use a language other than English and who completed ESOL/IELTS qualifications that address their distinctive language learning needs, rather than Functional Skills English or GCSE qualifications, which are often unsuitable for this group according to research (Education and Training Foundation, 2021) and evidence from further education providers (The Bell Foundation, 2024). The Department should consider recognising Level 2 ESOL and IELTS band scores 6/6.5 and above and including them in the list of suitable English qualifications.

***“This omission discriminates competent fluent individuals with relevant early years foundation stage (EYFS) experience who use a language other than English”***

Also, the complex and expensive application process can disadvantage potential candidates with relevant experience with early years overseas qualifications. In addition to the cost of the ECCTIS Early Years Statement service, applicants must also pay for translations of documents if these are not in English and ask their training providers to complete a self-certification form only in English. The Foundation recommends that the Department reviews this process to make it more accessible.

**Would you like to expand on any of the responses you made to this consultation?**

Competent and fluent bilingual/multilingual practitioners who have gained early years qualifications and relevant experience overseas and for whom English is an Additional Language are part of the solution to the recruitment and retention issue that the Government is trying to solve through the experience-based route. Not only do they have suitable professional skills, but they also bring with them valuable funds of intercultural knowledge

and linguistic expertise which can be effectively deployed to promote the language development of children who are new to English while also fostering their home language maintenance, facilitate engagement with parents and carers who come from diverse backgrounds, providing key mediation skills to help newly arrived families navigate a new education system, and provide successful models of fully integrated citizens.

***“Competent...practitioners who have gained early years qualifications and relevant experience overseas and for whom English is an Additional Language are **part of the solution to the recruitment and retention issue**”***

It makes sense that the systemic barriers that the current proposals have not yet removed are effectively addressed, so that capable and experienced practitioners do not experience disadvantage and discrimination, which is detrimental not just to these individuals, but to the early years sector and society as a whole. Including Level 2 ESOL qualifications and IELTS band scores 6/6.5 and above in the list of suitable Level 2 English qualifications, and streamlining the complicated, time-consuming, and costly process of recognition of qualifications gained outside the UK are two important steps in this direction.

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### About The Bell Foundation

This briefing has been developed by The Bell Foundation, a charitable, evidence-led foundation that aims to improve educational, employment and justice outcomes for people who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). The Foundation collaborates with leading universities and think tanks to develop an evidence base and works with a network of schools to develop and deliver practical solutions to help improve the attainment of pupils who are at risk of underachieving. In 2022, the Foundation supported over 26,000 teachers and educational professionals to support children who use English as an Additional Language through the training of teachers and webinars.

A series of policy briefings about our three programmes, EAL education in schools, ESOL and post-16 English education, and overcoming language barriers in the criminal justice system, is available on our website here: [Policy - The Bell Foundation \(bell-foundation.org.uk\)](https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk)

