

Early Years Practitioner

Early years practitioners look after and educate children from six weeks to five years of age. Occasionally they look after children between five and eight years old.

They may also be known as nursery workers, early years workers or child development officers.

The Work

You could be:

- planning and supervising learning and play according to the early years curriculum
- promoting children's learning development by reading, writing and numeracy work
- helping children's social and emotional development through games, stories, music and arts activities
- washing and feeding young children, cleaning and tidying, preparing snacks
- arranging outdoor activities such as visits to parks and outdoor games
- monitoring and assessing each individual child's progress and needs
- possibly specialising in looking after children with special needs
- working with teachers, psychologists, social workers and parents.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the company or organisation you work in
- the demand for the job.

Modern Apprentices would usually start on the National Minimum Wage (NMW) apprentice rate. The apprentice rate, for those aged under 19 or aged 19 or over and in the first year of their apprenticeship, is £8.00 an hour (1 April 2026).

Starting salaries for qualified early years practitioners in Scotland vary.

In private nurseries, starting salaries are around £23,000 to £25,000 a year.

Salaries in local council nurseries can vary but usually start from around £26,000 to £28,000 a year, rising to around £30,000 to £32,000 a year with experience.

Conditions

- You could work in conditions that might be untidy and noisy.
- Young children need a lot of physical care such as feeding and toileting, so the work can be messy.
- Your hours would normally be 35 to 40 hours per week, Monday to Friday. Most nurseries are open during school holidays.

- Hours may include shifts, if the nursery opens early (some open at 7.30am) and closes late (many are open until at least 6.00pm). If a parent is late in coming to collect a child someone must stay on with the child.

Getting In

In Scotland, there are two main ways to qualify.

- By taking an NC in Early Education and Childcare, one year full time, followed by the HNC in Childhood Practice for a further year full time. Entry to the NC is usually 3-5 subjects at National 4 or 5 including English. Entry to the HNC is by completing the NC first or 2 Highers including English.
- More and more are entering this profession through a Modern Apprenticeship. Here, you would study for an SVQ in Social Services (Children and Young People) at Levels 6 and 7 in partnership with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).
- Completing a Foundation Apprenticeship in Social Services (Children and Young People) whilst at school may increase your chances of getting accepted on an HNC or into a Modern Apprenticeship.
- Employers expect you to be registered with the SSSC, or willing to do so within a certain time after starting the job.
- It is useful to have experience working with children and skills in art, crafts, music or dance are helpful.
- You need to be fit to look after children and lead them in their activities.
- You will require a satisfactory criminal record check from Disclosure Scotland to show that you are suitable for this type of work. Contact [Disclosure Scotland](#) for details on the type you would need.
- You could work in local council run nurseries, private nursery schools or college or workplace creches.

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- able to get on well with and enjoy working with children
- practical and well organised
- aware of the needs of young children
- interested in the care and development of young children
- warm and friendly – to offer children emotional support
- patient, tolerant and understanding
- responsible and confident
- calm in emergencies.

You should have:

- imagination and initiative for planning activities
- common sense
- an understanding of different cultures and parenting styles
- a sense of humour.

Training

- Training is usually on the job and through short courses, to keep up to date with new ideas.
- Apprentices may attend college on a weekly or monthly basis.
- You normally need to gain a first aid certificate and food hygiene certificate.

Getting On

- Many early years practitioners specialise in one area of work, but you could move jobs to get broader experience.
- With experience, you may become manager, or head of a nursery.
- To progress to manager/lead practitioner, you would need to complete further qualifications. This could be the Technical Apprenticeship in Childhood Practice (at SCQF Level 9), the BA Hons in Childhood Practice or the PDA Childhood Practice (at SCQF Level 9).
- You could become self-employed by opening a private nursery or creche.

More Information

Due to the Scottish Government increasing the number of funded nursery hours, there will be an increase in the number of jobs available in early learning and childcare. Find out more from their [Early Learning and Childcare Careers](#) website.

Contacts

Early Learning and Childcare Careers

Website: childcarecareersscotland.scot

Website (2): childcarecareersscotland.scot/joy-search

Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)

Tel: 0345 60 30 891

Website: www.sssc.uk.com

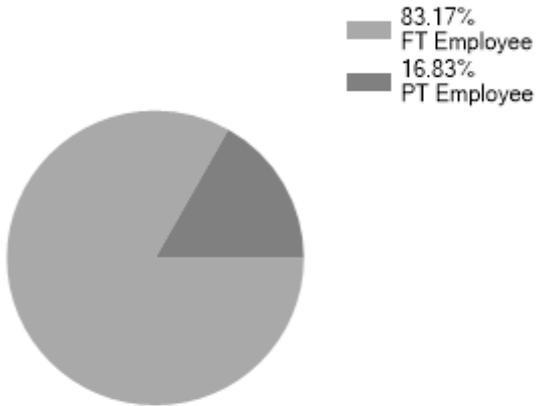
Website (2): learn.sssc.uk.com/careers

X: @SSSCnews

Facebook: www.facebook.com/thesssc

Statistics

Employment Status UK %



Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment Statistics : Not available this career.