

Ensuring that apprentices receive sufficient **workplace learning time** is essential for their professional growth, especially within the early years sector. With a combination of mentoring support, practice opportunities, and well-structured workplace learning, apprentices gain the confidence and expertise necessary to meet the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) principles and professional practice standards.



Drawing on insights from leaders in the sector such as Teach Early Years, Teachwire, and The Childcare Company, this post explores practical ways to monitor and enhance workplace learning for apprentices. We will also explore tools such <https://www.teachearlyyears.com/product-focus/view/what-should-employers-look-for-in-a-level-3-early-years-educator-apprenticeship> as progress reviews and development coaching, crucial for ensuring apprentices' success.

Understanding Workplace Learning Time in Early Years Apprenticeships

Workplace learning time refers to the time apprentices spend engaged in practical activities, applying theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. This type of learning is key to developing skills aligned with the Early Years Educator occupational standard, embedding EYFS principles, and fostering professional growth. Unlike classroom or off-the-job training, workplace learning is hands-on and embedded in daily practice within childcare settings.

Apprenticeships combine three key elements:

- **On-the-job training:** Practical experience in real childcare environments.
- **Off-the-job training:** Formal learning, often in workshops or online sessions.
- **Mentoring support:** Guidance and coaching from experienced practitioners.

To ensure apprentices' development, on-the-job training or workplace learning must be purposeful and regularly monitored.

Why Workplace Learning Time Matters

Workplace learning is where apprentices apply key knowledge and build foundational skills that underpin:

- **Child development knowledge:** Observing and supporting how children grow cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally in real time.
- **Safeguarding:** Recognising signs of harm, understanding policies, and contributing to a safe environment.
- **Wellbeing, health and safety:** Promoting positive routines and ensuring risk assessments are followed.
- **EYFS implementation:** Embedding learning outcomes through everyday interactions and activities.
- **Risk management:** Preparing apprentices to identify and mitigate hazards in dynamic early years settings.

Without sufficient workplace learning time, apprentices can struggle to translate theory into professional practice, affecting both their confidence and competence.

Signs an Apprentice Is Getting Enough Workplace Learning Time

So, how can you tell that an apprentice is engaging adequately with workplace learning? Consider these key indicators:

1. Active Involvement in Daily Practice

Apprentices should be regularly involved in a variety of practical tasks throughout the day, such as:

- Supporting children's routines and play
- Helping facilitate learning experiences based on EYFS principles
- Participating in team meetings, including safeguarding briefings
- Contributing to risk assessments and safety checks

Regular, meaningful involvement shows that the apprentice is not just present but actively learning through observation and practice.

2. Progress Reviews Highlighting Practical Achievements

Progress reviews are critical regular checkpoints where apprentices, mentors, and managers discuss development. A thorough review will:

- Document practical skills and knowledge acquired

- Assess confidence in applying safeguarding protocols
- Identify areas with less exposure needing more workplace learning
- Plan future on-the-job learning goals aligned with the occupational standard

By asking apprentices to provide examples from their daily practice during reviews, mentors ensure workplace learning is translating into real competence.

3. Use of Development Coaching to Embed Learning

Development coaching sessions focus on reflecting upon workplace experiences and identifying learning points. Through coaching, mentors help apprentices:

- Connect practical tasks to early years knowledge domains
- Gain insight into safeguarding and child wellbeing practices
- Develop professional attitudes and problem-solving skills
- Set achievable targets for workplace learning time each week

Frequent coaching demonstrates workplace learning is an ongoing, supported process rather than a passive experience.

Challenges Affecting Adequate Workplace Learning Time

Several factors can impact whether apprentices gain enough hands-on learning, including:

- **Busy childcare settings:** Staffing pressures might limit available mentoring time.
- **Limited diversity of practice opportunities:** Apprentices might be restricted to routine tasks without exposure to safeguarding or risk management.
- **Unclear expectations:** Without well-defined learning objectives linked to EYFS, daily activities can become disconnected from apprenticeship standards.

Organisations like The Childcare Company advocate for robust induction and planning frameworks that ensure apprentices receive balanced workplace learning.

Best Practices to Maximise Workplace Learning Time

To guarantee that apprentices benefit fully from workplace learning time, childcare settings and coordinators can implement these strategies:

1. Structured Onboarding and Learning Plans

A clear onboarding process tailored to apprentices outlines expectations for learning in the workplace. This plan should:

- Balance practical duties with developmental opportunities
- Include allocated time for observation, mentoring, and reflection
- Reference EYFS outcomes and the Early Years Educator occupational standard

Teach Early Years regularly publishes resources on creating effective training plans focused on workplace learning.

2. Dedicated Mentoring Support

Mentors must be assigned who are experienced practitioners capable of providing ongoing guidance, feedback, and encouragement. Mentorship should:

- Offer tailored coaching aligned to apprentice strengths and development needs
- Provide regular opportunities to discuss progress and challenges
- Model best practices in safeguarding, health and safety, and EYFS implementation

3. Regular Progress Reviews

Scheduling frequent progress reviews—ideally every 6 to 8 weeks—ensures workplace learning remains on track. Reviews can be supported by tools such as:

- Competency tracking forms
- Apprentice self-assessment logs
- Feedback from colleagues and managers

4. Integrating Off-the-Job Training with Workplace Practice

Coordinating off-the-job learning and directing apprentices to apply new skills immediately in the workplace enhances retention and confidence. For example:

- After safeguarding workshops, apprentices lead safeguarding reflections within the room
- Following child development modules, apprentices tailor play activities to developmental stages

Monitoring Workplace Learning Time: A Practical Framework

Tracking workplace learning time systematically helps ensure apprentices are progressing. Here's a sample weekly monitoring table childcare managers can adopt:

Day	Planned Learning Activity	Mentoring Support Provided	Practice Opportunities Completed	Safeguarding/Health & Safety Exposure	Reflection or Coaching Session	Total Workplace Learning Time (hours)
Monday	Supporting child-led activities	1:1 mentoring during lunch	Observed & supported group play	Room safety checklist completed	15-minute coaching	5
Tuesday	Risk assessment walkthrough	Shadow senior practitioner	Led tidy-up routine	Discussed safeguarding case scenarios	Reflection log completed	6

Employing such a tracking framework means apprentices' practical exposure is visible and can be proactively increased where needed.

How Teach Early Years, Teachwire, and The Childcare Company Support Workplace Learning

These organisations provide valuable sector-specific resources, guidance, and training to maximise apprentices' workplace experiences:

- **Teach Early Years:** Offers practical articles and downloadable templates on mentoring and apprenticeship management, helping settings to embed workplace learning effectively.
- **Teachwire:** Delivers regular news updates and best practice case studies showcasing how settings enhance mentoring support and provide varied practice opportunities.
- **The Childcare Company:** Provides in-depth training sessions and workshops specifically designed to help practitioners integrate safeguarding, health and safety, and EYFS requirements into daily practice.

Final Thoughts: Ensuring Quality Workplace Learning Time for Apprentices

Workplace learning time is a cornerstone of early years apprenticeships. When apprentices spend enough time in purposeful, varied, and well-supported practical roles, they develop critical skills and confidence. Supporting this learning with mentoring and coaching, alongside regular progress reviews, means apprentices thrive not just as students but as emerging professionals.

By focusing on safeguarding, wellbeing, health and safety, risk management, and applying child development knowledge in everyday settings, childcare providers help apprentices meet the full spectrum of EYFS and occupational standards. Leveraging expert resources from Teach Early Years, Teachwire, and The Childcare Company further strengthens this process.

Remember, the key questions to keep asking are: *Are apprentices actively involved in daily practice? Are they receiving mentoring support? Are practice opportunities diverse and purposeful? Is learning progress regularly reviewed and coached?* A positive yes to these indicators signals that apprentices are indeed getting enough workplace learning time.