



Chief Examiner Report

**NCFE CACHE Level 3 Applied General
Certificate for Early Years, Childcare and
Education
QN: 603/2988/9**

Assessment code: AGCEYCE

Paper number: P003120

**Submission window: 13 January 2026 - 28
January 2026**

Introduction

This report contains information in relation to the external assessment from the chief examiner, with an emphasis on the standard of learner work within this assessment window.

The aim is to highlight where learners generally performed well as well as any areas where further development may be required.

Key points:

- grade achievements
- administering the external assessment
- standard of learner work
- assessment structure
- use of word allocation
- criteria requirements and command verbs
- referencing of external assessment tasks
- assessment criteria (AC)
- regulations for the conduct of external assessment.

It is important to note that learners should not sit the external assessment until they have taken part in the relevant teaching of the full qualification content.

Grade achievements

Grade	NYA	P	M	D	Learners	133
% of learners	16.54	11.28	36.84	35.34	Pass rate	83.46%

Administering the external assessment

The external assessment is invigilated and must be conducted in line with JCQ [Instructions for Conducting Examinations \(ICE\)](#) document. Learners may require additional pre-release material in order to complete the tasks within the paper. These must be provided to learners in line with our regulations.

Learners must be given the resources to carry out the tasks and these are highlighted within the [Qualification Specific Instructions for Delivery \(QSID\)](#) document.

Standard of learner work

The external assessment task titled “Supporting children’s play” requires learners to keep every response clearly linked to the title. Some NYA decisions resulted from learners not making explicit or relevant connections between their discussion and the focus of the assessment. Providers are reminded that sustained reference to the task title is essential for meeting the criteria and demonstrating understanding of the context.

Assessment structure

The assessment structure was clear to read; the explanation provided additional guidance to the learner. The learners followed the required assessment structure, addressing the pass criteria, followed by the merit and distinction. A cover sheet was completed, and details were correctly recorded. A small number of submissions were not labelled correctly, which made it difficult for examiners to distinguish between learners’ notes and their final assessment work. This caused some uncertainty about which material should be assessed. Providers are reminded to check all submissions carefully before sending them and to ensure that every document is clearly labelled so that examiners can identify each component of the assessment without confusion.

Use of word allocation

Most learners used the 1,500-word allocation effectively. Some divided their word count equally across the pass, merit, and distinction sections, which restricted the level of detail needed for the higher-grade criteria. Because the distinction tasks require evaluation, they generally demand a larger share of the word count. Learners attempting distinction work therefore needed to be more concise in their pass-level responses to allow enough space for the depth of discussion expected at the higher level.

Some responses did not demonstrate sufficient breadth or depth of knowledge to achieve the higher criteria. As all pass criteria must be met for an overall pass, limited detail in any section prevented some learners from progressing to higher grades. References are not included in the final word count, so learners can cite sources without affecting their allocation.

Providers must ensure that the full eight hours of permitted assessment time is provided. Reducing the time does not meet assessment regulations, and learners must be given the opportunity to use the complete duration. Providers should consider this requirement carefully when timetabling the assessment session.

Criteria requirements and command verbs

Providers may find it helpful to revisit the meanings of the command verbs with learners, so they have a clear understanding of what each criterion requires. For instance, *describe* expects learners to extend and develop their ideas rather than provide brief statements. It is important that learners read each criterion carefully to ensure they meet all parts of the requirement, especially where more than one point, way, or reason is needed. It was positive to see where providers had referred to previous chief examiner reports and advised the learners to carefully construct their response and to maintain focus on the title, for example by writing, ‘One reason this is important is that..., the second reason is....’ and so on.

Referencing of external assessment tasks

Overall, many learners demonstrated a reasonable understanding of referencing requirements and generally used quotations appropriately to support their knowledge. However, despite guidance provided in previous chief examiner reports, there were still examples where references or quotations were submitted as if they were standalone criteria. The assessment guidance makes clear that references must support the written response within each grade criterion and should not be presented as a separate section.

Some learners would benefit from support in developing effective referencing skills. Quotations must be clearly identifiable and traceable, and in a few cases, learners did not achieve a pass because their referencing was limited or because they did not include any quotations to underpin their work. When quotations are used, examiners must be able to verify the source easily. Quotes should appear within the main body of the response to reinforce the learner's own understanding.

Assessment criteria (AC)

P1 criteria

Most learners showed that they understood the importance of meeting children's needs by giving two clear reasons to show the importance of meeting children's needs in relation to the title.

P2 criteria

Most learners met this criterion by identifying two or more policies or procedures that underpin practice and relate directly to the assessment title. However, some responses did not make clear links to supporting play. Instead, they described general policies and procedures without explaining how these influence or support children's play. For example, when describing a health and safety policy, learners needed to show how it supports safe play opportunities, such as ensuring the play environment is free from hazards so children can play and explore confidently and develop their physical skills. Without a clear connection to play, the response did not fully meet the requirements of the criterion.

P3 criteria

Many learners showed a secure understanding and were able to describe at least two characteristics of an enabling environment that supports children's play. Some learners developed their responses by making explicit links to the EYFS, demonstrating how statutory guidance informs the creation of enabling play environments. In a few cases, learners lost focus on the assessment title because they moved into theoretical discussion. In these cases, the theory was presented in isolation rather than being applied to play, which meant the responses did not demonstrate the relevant knowledge and understanding required. Others focused heavily on theory, and they overlooked the need to describe features of an enabling environment.

M1 criteria

Learners demonstrated a clear understanding of this criterion and were able to discuss the impact of one theoretical approach on children's learning or development in relation to the title. A wide range of theories was observed across scripts, including Piaget, Vygotsky, Tina Bruce,

and Mildred Parten, showing that learners had been introduced to a broad theoretical foundation. It was evident that those who selected a theory they understood well were able to make strong, relevant links to how it influences children's play, learning, or development. Their responses showed secure knowledge of the chosen theorist and a clear ability to connect the theory directly to the title.

M2 criteria

Many learners responded well and were able to explain how child-centred planning meets the individual needs of children in relation to the title. Strong responses addressed the importance of understanding children's needs, following their interests, using observations, and planning next steps. For example, a child-centred approach might involve observing a child's fascination with pouring water, recognising this as an interest linked to early mathematical and physical development, and planning further play opportunities to extend their learning. This type of explanation demonstrated a clear link between child-centred planning and the focus on supporting play. Some learners, however, made loose links; their responses drifted into general planning processes without showing how these directly support children's play or meet individual needs. Some responses focused on child-centred practice rather than looking at child-centred planning.

D1 criteria

Many learners did not attempt this criterion, which requires two strategies to be evaluated from more than one perspective, showing both strengths and limitations in relation to the title. Where learners did attempt it, there were some strong examples where two strategies were clearly identified and evaluated from different viewpoints. An example might be the strategy of free-flow play: Free-flow play allows children to move independently between indoor and outdoor environments, supporting their confidence, and independence. Practitioners can observe children naturally, finding out their interests and developmental needs. The children can follow their own ideas, and make choices, which supports their motivation and creativity. However, it can be challenging for the practitioners to supervise the children properly both indoors and outdoors, and some children might need more adult help than others. Also, some children may feel overwhelmed by too much choice, or they might only choose familiar activities, which could stop them from trying new things.

This type of evaluation shows clear strengths and limitations from more than one perspective and keeps the discussion linked to the title. Whereas some responses were brief descriptions or general statements rather than evaluating the strategy or relating it to supporting children's play. The strategies must be in relation to the title; it may be helpful for learners to understand the broad term 'strategy', which can be a plan or a method to support children, for example being a role model, planning activities, observing the children and so on. The strategies must also be from more than one perspective, for example the child, the practitioner (s), the parent, or a group of children.

D2 criteria

To achieve this criterion, learners needed to show evidence of wider background reading by including carefully selected, identifiable, and traceable quotations within their work. This means they must go beyond general knowledge or class notes and draw on recognised sources that

support their discussion in relation to the title. Learners who did not include identifiable or relevant quotations could not meet this criterion.

Regulations for the conduct of external assessment

Malpractice

There were zero instances of malpractice in this assessment window. The chief examiner would like to take this opportunity to advise students that instance of malpractice (for example, copying of work from another learner or the misuse of AI) will affect the outcome of the assessment.

Maladministration

There were zero instances of maladministration in this assessment window. The chief examiner would like to highlight the importance of adhering to the JCQ [Instructions for Conducting Examinations \(ICE\)](#) in this respect.

Chief examiner: Emma McCormick

Date: 7th April 2026