

Essex Early Years Nourishing Our Future (NOF) Award

The NOF Award Toolkit



Working together for Essex




What is the NOF Award?

The NOF Award supports early years settings across Essex to implement the new DfE EYFS Nutrition Guidance, creating healthier food foundations for young children and families.

The NOF award has been co-created in response to the Nourishing Our Future research (2025), led by Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) and commissioned by Essex County Council (ECC) Public Health, and in partnership throughout Summer 2025, with local early years settings, ECC Public Health, ECC Education and ARU.

By joining, you'll become part of a vibrant, county wide community, committed to innovation, collaboration and shared learning. We will work together to drive continuous improvement, share successes, and champion sector leading practice in early years food and nutrition.

Training and support




The NOF Award offers a dedicated space that includes practical guidance, support, training, and resources to help early years educators, parents and carers to embed good nutrition, food education, and positive mealtime experiences into everyday practice.



Recognition and reward

Whether you're just beginning your healthy eating journey or looking to build upon strong foundations, the NOF Award helps you grow with confidence, celebrating progress through an accreditation framework and connecting you with like minded professionals.

Reflect and evaluate



Together, we position Essex as a leading example of how early years settings can champion children's lifelong health and wellbeing through collective action and excellence.





NOF Principles

Child

We believe that every child in Essex deserves the knowledge, nurturing and nourishment they need to thrive.



Parents

We are proud to work in partnership with parents and carers, supporting families to make healthy choices at home and strengthening the links between setting and home life.

Settings

We are part of a growing movement, sharing ideas and learning from each other. By collaborating in this way, we are improving practice in our own settings and helping to make Essex a national leader in children's food, drink, nutrition, health and wellbeing.

NOF Values




By joining the Essex Early Years Nourishing Our Future (NOF) Award, we are investing in a healthy start and supporting a healthier lifelong future for every child and family in our care.

We are building strong foundations for lifelong health and wellbeing by encouraging balanced nutrition, food education, and positive mealtime experiences with children and parents from the very start. We know that healthy habits formed in the early years can last a lifetime.



NOF Themes

Analysis of the research, in line with the aims and objectives, revealed six thematic areas shown below. Click on the  report to read more, or visit www.nourishingourfuture.co.uk



**Requirements
and Guidance**



**Nutrition and
Portion Size**



**Food
Environment**



**Food
Inclusivity**



**Food
Education**



**Sustainable
Food**

NOF Award levels



Make your commitment

Engage with the community



Become a leader of practice



Essex County Council

a.r.u.

Rooting criteria

Make your commitment



Sign up to the NOF award, committing to the values and principles statements.



Sign up to the Essex Early Years and Childcare Charter.



Review the DfE EYFS Nutrition Guidance and self assess your practice.



Develop and implement a food, drink and nutrition policy.



Include a link to food and nutrition in your climate action plan.



Inform parents by sharing the EYFS Nutrition Guidance, NOF Award information and NOF website.



Ensure all staff have completed basic food hygiene training (level 2).



Nominate a setting 'food, drink and nutrition lead' to lead on the implementation of the NOF Award.



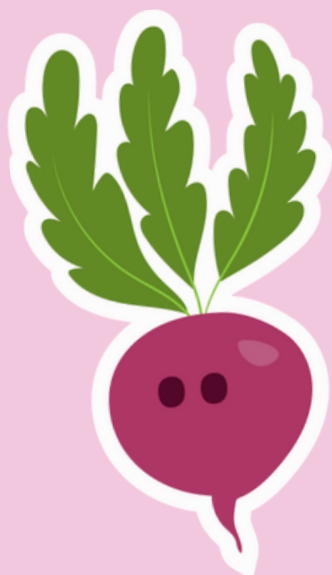
Engage children in food and nutrition educational activities.



Signpost eligible families to the national healthy start scheme where appropriate.



"Early years nutrition is our future"



Sprouting criteria

Engage with your community



At least one member of staff to complete and embed additional food and nutrition training.



Share good practice within and beyond your own setting.



Attend at least 3 NOF events.



Reflect upon and develop mealtime practices and environments.



Establish a method of gathering child voice on food provision and education to inform regular planning.



Deliver food, drink and nutrition education activities across the 7 EYFS areas of learning.



Communicate regularly with parents about food and nutrition.



Confidently evidence full alignment of practice and provision with the EYFS Nutrition Guidance.



Embed sustainable food practices across your provision.



Complete a NOF testimonial to reflect on being a part of the NOF Award and share examples of impact.



"Healthy eating is a life skill"

Blooming criteria

Become a leader of practice



All staff to have engaged in food, drink and nutrition training / CPD / education.



Carry out regular reviews of food provision (portion size, food groups) and mealtime practices.



Work in partnership with parents and carers to extend healthy eating into the home and wider community.



Actively involve children in planning menus, food preparation, and food education.



Promote local public health services.



Share and showcase innovative and high quality sustainable food practices across your provision.



Evidence impact and leadership of a change or development of food and nutrition practice in your setting.



Gather parent and carer testimonials and feedback to evidence impact of food, drink and nutrition activities with parents / carers.



"Keep sharing ideas together"

Partnerships

We are delighted to be working with expert organisations and individuals to support day nurseries, childminders and preschools to implement the NOF award. They are creating new, bespoke resources for Essex based settings, parents and carers.

CHARLOTTE STIRLING REED



Charlotte Stirling-Reed is a UK-based Registered Nutritionist specialising in baby and child nutrition. Founder of SR Nutrition and author of *How to Wean Your Baby*, she's known for her evidence-based, practical advice that supports families during the early years. Charlotte has worked with the NHS, collaborated with public figures like Joe Wicks, and regularly contributes to media and conferences, helping shape healthier futures for children.

"I'm thrilled to be collaborating with the team at NOF to share practical, evidence-based guidance with parents on feeding young children. The Early Years are a critical window for shaping lifelong eating habits, and there's so much we can do to support children's health and wellbeing during these early years."

CATHERINE LIPPE

Catherine Lippe is a Registered Nutritionist and Head of Nutrition and Policy at Nursery Kitchen. With nearly two decades of experience, she specialises in early years nutrition, shaping menus, influencing policy, and championing better food standards to support children's health and wellbeing. Nursery Kitchen creates fresh, nutritionally balanced meals for early years settings, inspiring children to develop a lifelong love of food. As leaders in early years nutrition, they combine delicious menus with expert guidance and advocacy to help settings raise healthy, happy children.

"I am delighted to support the NOF Award and the valuable support this offers to early years settings in Essex. It's undeniable that the food children eat in the early years has far reaching consequences for children's health, wellbeing and educational outcomes. Initiatives such as the NOF Award will allow more settings to access the support needed to give children the best possible start and I am particularly pleased to be involved in delivering the training element of this award."



LAURA MATTHEWS



Laura is a Registered Nutritionist, food consultant and early years nutrition expert. Her mission is to help those responsible for the food children eat, be that parents, education providers or food brands, with the knowledge, inspiration and confidence to ensure every child gets the best nutritional start in life.

"I'm thrilled to support the new Essex Early Years Nourishing Our Future Award! This award is exactly what the sector needs - finally recognising the incredible work early years practitioners do in shaping children's health, while providing the structured support and expert resources settings need to excel in food provision. I'm delighted to be part of an initiative that truly puts children's nutrition at the heart of early years practice."



nourishingourfuture.co.uk




Get in touch

Working together for Essex


nourishing
our future 


Essex County Council

 a.r.u.

 theNOFaward@essex.gov.uk

@ [nourishingourfuture](https://nourishingourfuture.co.uk)

 nourishingourfuture.co.uk

