

# United Kingdom

## Country Overview

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## Country name

United Kingdom

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## Introduction

Social and emotional wellbeing is considered a key area of development for early childhood education and care (ECEC), later being included among the main content areas of the British National Curriculum at all educational levels (Cefai, Bartolo, Cavioni & Downes, 2018).

## Development

In the United Kingdom (UK), early childhood education and care (ECEC) is universal for children from 3 and 4 years of age (also often referred to as childcare (Lloyd, 2015)). For younger children, early education is also available, both as a mix of private for-profit and not-for-profit (Eurydice, 2021). ECEC aims to be available and provide high-quality services according to the families and children's specific needs, also including a focus on disadvantaged children and families, aiming to improve life changes and social mobility through education. Overall, the UK is committed to increasing the quality of the early years' education, aiming to prepare children for formal schooling and support families, including those in disadvantage.

Several areas of learning and development are identified by the UK ECEC and are included as key for ECEC practitioners to focus on, namely: communication and language, physical/motor development - moving and handling, health and self-care, and personal, social and emotional development (Eurydice, 2021). Social and emotional skills, including for instance children's self-confidence and self-awareness, managing feelings and behaviour, and making relationships, are included as a core area for ECEC in the UK, being an integral part of The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), which records children's development against the 17 early learning goals in early years (Eurydice, 2021).

## Assessment

Regarding the deployment of SEL programmes within school settings in the UK, there has been a significant variation in terms of evaluations conducted. Particularly for the intervention of early aged children attending educational settings, evidence of the effectiveness of the interventions conducted in such settings is scarce. For instance, the programme Zippy's Friends has been implemented in UK preschools, but the main research in the UK is only available for older children (e.g., Clarke, Bunting & Barry, 2014; Sloan, Gildea, Miller & Thurston, 2018). Regardless, an evaluation protocol for a large scale evaluation of Zippy's Friends effects in UK children from 6 to 7 years of age was developed (Sloan et al., 2017), as well as the documentation of positive effects of the programme with children and young people with special education needs ([https://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/uploads/Files/PDFs/Evaluation\\_Zippys\\_Friends\\_Judith%20Trust.pdf](https://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/uploads/Files/PDFs/Evaluation_Zippys_Friends_Judith%20Trust.pdf)).

Moreover, reports on project implementation documented some results of the program effects. We found project reports documenting the effects of the implementation of Zippy's in the UK. In Southampton, a report describes the evaluation of the Zippy's Friends program. The study involved four intervention classes in three schools, and three control classes in one school. Results show improvements in the intervention groups emotional literacy skills and hyperactivity, with teachers and children considering that the program was positive (Holmes & Faupel, 2004, 2005). In Northampton, children in the Zippy's Friends intervention groups showed more gains in their

levels of self-esteem, as rated by their class teachers (Davidson, 2011).

In relation to the Second Step Early Learning and the MindUP 3-7 programs, although implemented in the UK, we found no published evidence regarding evidence on how such interventions were evaluated (<https://guidebook.eif.org.uk/programme/second-step-early-learning>, 2019).

## Intervention

Several intervention programs can be found in the UK across all school grades, from universal programs to target programs. Particularly for the early years, universal programs such as Zippy's Friends, Second Step Early Learning, and MindUP 3-7, have been implemented across the UK. These are all universal programs, widely used internationally, and with evidence of its effectiveness in several countries (e.g., Clarke et al., 2014; Crooks et al., 2020; Thierry et al., 2016).

More specifically, Zippy's is a universal intervention for children from 5 to 7 years of age that aims to improve children's social and emotional skills, particularly coping skills. It is organised in 24 sessions of 45 minutes each. Sessions are designed around stories focusing on themes such as: friendship, conflict, change, and difficult feelings. In the UK, Zippy's Friends is provided by a UK-based non-profit agency, Partnership for Children, which licences agencies in other countries to implement the program. Second Step Early Learning is a universal, classroom-based programme designed to promote social-emotional competence and self-regulation. It has several versions, including a version for children from 4 and 5 years of age. The programme is delivered across 28 weekly activities including either the whole group or small-group activities. MindUP 3-7 is a schools-based social and emotional learning and mindfulness programme. This universal programme has three versions, including a version for young children from 3 to 7 years of age. The programme supports children in developing strategies to focus attention, regulate emotions, and engage in prosocial behaviours in order to foster positive academic, social, and emotional well-being. It is organised in 15 sessions, with a core part of the intervention focusing on the use of mindfulness techniques.

## References

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