

2017



The State of the Childminding Sector Executive Summary



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NICMA State of the Childminding Sector Executive summary 2017

Introduction

NICMA is a voluntary organisation with charitable status providing a range of services which support registered childminders, parents, children and stakeholders within the childminding sector. NICMA's work falls broadly into four categories: Training and Quality, Childminding Development, Support Services and Childminding Networks. NICMA's vision for the future is where all children are cared for, and provided with the opportunity to learn and develop in a safe, enjoyable home environment and where Childminders are recognised and valued as skilled, qualified professionals.

Registered childminding is the largest provider of full time childcare in Northern Ireland. At 31st March 2016, there were 3,188 childminders providing 17,559 day care places. This equated to two thirds of those providing day care services and a third of the places provided with an average of six child places per childminder (DHSSPS, 2016).

Background

In September 2016 NICMA received part funding from the Health and Social Care Board, on behalf of the Childcare Partnerships, to carry out an independent study on the State of the Childminding Sector. NICMA believed this study was necessary in order to gain a full assessment of the sector to inform future planning for the organisation and influence policy makers. This is the first comprehensive assessment that has been carried out regarding childminding provision in Northern Ireland for some time.

Methodology

The questionnaire consisted of 47 questions seeking childminders views on all aspects of childminding practice. This included:

- Childminders profile
- Childminders business
- Childminding additional services
- Childminders support
- Childminders qualifications and training

A total of **929 childminders out of 3,135 across Northern Ireland** completed the questionnaire giving a **30% response rate**. NICMA believe that this provides a robust and representative sample as it consists of the views and attitudes of new and established registered childminders in Northern Ireland.

Summary of findings

Childminders Profile

- Only 1% of childminders in the sector are male and very few are from different ethnic minorities
- 28% of respondents are from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.
- 35% of respondents have been in the profession for less than five years
- 14% of respondents were between the age of 18 – 35 years
- The majority of childminders work full time with the highest percentage working between 40 – 45 hours.

Childminders business

- 60% of respondents charge between £3.00 - £3.99 per hour per child. There is no variation between full and part time.
- 37% of respondents feel their childminding business is secure whilst 59% have concerns about their future.
- 46% of respondents stated they have vacancies and have been trying to fill these for over three months. 93% of respondents try to fill their vacancies through word of mouth/personal recommendation.
- The main reason identified for not being able to fill vacancies is due to parents preferring to use informal care such as grandparents. The second most common reason stated is due to respondents facing competition from one or more unregistered childminders in their area. 55% of respondents believe that unregistered childminders undermine the professionalism of their job
- 27% of respondents stated they know of one or two unregistered childminders in their area and 10% stated they know of three or more.

Childminding additional services

- 68% of respondents stated that they would be willing to care for a child with additional needs. 15% of respondents stated they are currently caring for a child with additional needs with Autism being identified as the most common additional need.
- A high percentage of childminders are willing to offer either a short term childminding service and/or an emergency service for parents.
- Respondents care for children from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. The most common is Polish with 33 children being cared for in childminding settings.

Childminders Support

- **83% of respondents stated they receive enough support in their role as a childminder. They identified the main source of support comes from other childminders.**
- **54% of respondents identified NICMA as a source of support.**
- **However, nearly half of the respondents had considered giving up childminding at some stage. The main identified reason for this was due to the increasing requirements linked to the introduction of the minimum standards in 2012.**

Qualifications and training

- **41% of respondents hold a formal early year's qualification. 24% hold a qualification at Level 3.**
- **100% of respondents have attended CPD training since becoming registered childminders.**
- **40% of respondents are interested in attending training in a range of topics.**
- **The main barrier to childminders accessing training is having to pay for it themselves**
- **The main factor that would encourage respondents to undertake training is if it was delivered free of charge.**

Conclusions and Recommendations

	Conclusions	Recommendations
1.	Only 1% of childminders in the sector are male.	NICMA would recommend an awareness raising campaign is developed to encourage men into the childminding profession.
2.	14% of respondents were between the age of 18 – 35 years	NICMA would recommend that a recruitment strategy is developed to encourage childminding as a viable career.
3.	Very few respondents are from different ethnic minorities.	NICMA would recommend funding is provided to provide bespoke training packages as pathways to employment and to increase the proportion of childminders from currently under-represented ethnic minority groups.
4.	A low number of children from different cultural backgrounds are accessing childminding services.	NICMA recommend that funding is made available to promote childminding as a potential choice for parents wanting to access childcare within ethnic minority communities.
5.	12% of respondents have been in the profession for less than five years.	NICMA recommend that further research is carried out to ascertain what current childminders want and need which will allow them to sustain a high quality service with a viable future.
6.	<p>The majority of respondents have been trying to fill their vacancies for less than three months. Respondents believe that unregistered childminders are the main reason why they can't fill their vacancies.</p> <p>The impact of unregistered childminders is a real concern with childminders feeling that they undermine the professionalism of their job.</p>	NICMA recommends the development of a campaign to tackle the issue of unregistered childminding.
7.	15% of respondents are caring for a child with additional needs.	NICMA would recommend the development of specialist childminding networks and/or the development of a bank of registered childminders to meet parental demands of caring for a child with additional needs.
8.	A high percentage of childminders are willing to offer either a short term	NICMA would recommend that funding is provided to develop a bank of trained registered

	childminding service and/or an emergency service for parents	childminders who can offer either a short term or emergency service for parents.
9.	33% of respondents stated they would be interested in becoming a member of a NICMA cluster/support buddy group of childminders in their local area.	NICMA would recommend looking at a range of fully funded support services for childminders which includes sustaining and increasing the number of childminding support/buddy groups throughout Northern Ireland to meet the demand highlighted as well as providing support to all non-group childminders.
10.	Nearly half of the childminders had considered giving up childminding at some stage with the main reason given being due to the increasing requirements linked to the introduction of the minimum standards. Childminders stated they need more advice, guidance and support around Minimum Standard requirements.	NICMA would recommend the development of a funded support strategy/quality support programme to provide childminders with a deeper understanding of the minimum standards and how these apply to their setting and also assist in preparation for inspection visits. This strategy would include follow-up sessions on previous Minimum Standards workshops that were delivered throughout NI using the additional guidance booklet for childminders. Both the workshops and guidance booklet were funded by the Childcare Partnerships through the Early Years Development Fund.
11.	37% of respondents feel their business is secure whilst other respondents have concerns about their future. A high percentage of childminders are struggling with the business side of their practice	NICMA recommend funded business management training and support for those childminders who are struggling to remain in the sector or cannot fill their vacancies.
12.	40% of respondents are interested in attending trainings needs to be in a range of topics. The main factor that would encourage respondents to undertake training is if it was delivered free of charge.	NICMA recommend the development of funded bespoke CPD training courses that all childminders can access to help enhance the quality of the childminding workforce. These training courses should be a mix of face-to-face and online training modules that can be accessed by all.
13.	Very few childminders hold a formal early years qualification.	NICMA recommend that it becomes a mandatory requirement that all registered childminders should undertake a comprehensive training package which includes the core minimum standard requirements. This could be used as a stepping stone to a formal qualification.

The Way Forward

NICMA believe that the recommendations in this State of the Sector report cannot be taken forward by the organisation alone. Responsibility for the development and implementation of all recommendations and tackling the main issues highlighted regarding the childminding sector is a shared one between a number of Northern Ireland Executive Departments as well as relevant stakeholders within early years.

The Northern Ireland Executive's commitment to the development and implementation of a Childcare Strategy¹ should address several of the issues highlighted in this report. The "quality" and "workforce development" section in the Childcare Strategy full draft recognises the important role that all childcare workers play in the lives of children, and the need for a well skilled childcare workforce to ensure long term positive outcomes. However, this report clearly illustrates how the Department of Health's Childminding and Day Care for Children Under Age 12 Minimum Standards² has been an influence on childminders leaving the sector. This is a concerning finding as the Employers for Childcare Cost survey³ and the Childcare Research Final Report⁴ clearly highlight how there is an unmet need for childminding services across Northern Ireland. The draft Childcare Strategy states how the Executive will continue to ensure that all registered childcare settings offer a high quality service that is at least compliant with Minimum Standards, and how it aims to continually improve quality childcare services. However, with increasing numbers leaving the sector an immediate investment is required in order to achieve a quality service to meet parental need.

NICMA believe that the Executive, through the Programme for Government⁵ alongside the Childcare, Investment⁶ and Economic Strategies⁷, as well as the Department of Education, through the Children and Young People Strategy should take forward the recommendations on increasing the number of males and the under-representation of people from an ethnic minority background in the childminding sector. NICMA believe that increasing gender equality provides children with positive role models of both genders and diverse age ranges within childminding settings and creates better acceptance by men that childminding can be seen as a career option.

NICMA are aware of the increase in parental need for specialist childminding services/networks and emergency/short term childminding in NI and this report highlights that childminders are willing to offer a childminding service for children with a disability. The Childcare Cost Survey clearly highlights how parents feel there is a lack of specialist childcare services in Northern Ireland. Childminding continues to remain an underused resource for children and families with additional needs and NICMA believe that children are missing out on the potential to access home-based childcare in a family environment with that one consistent adult. To solve this issue NICMA believe that the Department of Education should take this forward through point 6.4.3 of the Children and Young People's Strategy⁸ 2017 – 2027 consultation document as well as the Executive through the

¹ Northern Ireland Executive, Delivering Social Change: A 10 Year Strategy for Affordable and Integrated Childcare 2015 – 2025

² Department of Health, Childminding and Day Care for Children Under Age 12 Minimum Standards (2012)

³ The Employers for Childcare - Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey: the seventh annual Childcare Cost Survey (2016)

⁴ Childcare Research Final Report , RSM McClure Watters OFMDFM. 2014.

⁵ Northern Ireland Executive, Programme for Government Consultation Document (2016)

⁶ Northern Ireland Executive, Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland - building a better future (2011-21)

⁷ Northern Ireland Executive, Economic Strategy Priorities for sustainable growth and prosperity (2012)

⁸ Department of Education, Children and Young People's Strategy Consultation Document (2017-2027)

Childcare Strategy: Intervention xi: Childcare for Children with a Disability and the Programme for Government Consultation document: Outcome 14 to ensure that every parent of a child with a disability has access to their preferred choice of childcare.

The problem of unregistered childminding continues to be a concern within the sector. The law is very clear: anybody looking after children for more than 2 hours a day, for reward, must register with the Health & Social Care Trust. Immediate action needs to be taken by the Executive through the Childcare Strategy: Intervention xx: and in partnership with the Department of Health to tackle this growing problem which potentially has the impact of putting children at risk. NICMA believe that not only does unregistered childminders potentially put children at risk; it also makes it harder for registered childminders to survive when they are faced with this unfair competition.

NICMA believe there are four key issues emerging from this research regarding childminding in Northern Ireland. These are:

- Affordability
- Accessibility
- Flexibility
- Quality

Affordability

This research has highlighted how the main reasons for childminders being unable to fill their vacancies is due to parents preferring to use informal childcare such as grandparents or childminders competing from one or more unregistered childminders in their area who charge less than they do. You can see from the findings of this research that the average hourly rate charged by respondents for both full time and part time is between £3.00 - £3.99. If childminders were to reduce this rate further then many would struggle to sustain their business and would be unable to survive financially. The Childcare Cost Survey states:

“Childminding costs decreased by 0.5% over the last year and now sit at an average of £169 per week. Once again childminding costs exceed day nursery costs. This year there is a £3 difference between the average cost of a childminder and a day nursery place, compared to a £12 difference in the 2015 results. This shows how steeply day nursery costs have risen over the last year, while childminding costs have remained similar to last year’s results” (p.8).

This statement needs to be taken in context in that the cost is based on a childminder working 50 hours per week. This equates to £3.38 per hour which is well below minimum wage. Childminders are self-employed individuals who could not afford to charge anything less or their business could not be viable.

NICMA are also aware that various research reports state there is lack of childminding services available throughout Northern Ireland. However, the findings in the main State of the Sector Report show that although childminders have vacancies, the days/hours available do not meet parental childcare needs. This may be the reason why parents cannot access childminding services in their area even though vacancies are available.

Another issue regarding affordability of childcare is also highlighted in the Childcare Research Final Report. It outlines how parents would like more financial support for childcare as affordability is a major barrier to them actually using the childcare they would prefer. Research carried out by the Child Poverty Alliance⁹ research also highlights a further issue by stating:

“The lack of affordable childcare therefore contributes to the unemployment rate, the economic inactivity rate and the number of people working part-time” (p.85).

The cost of childcare therefore has a huge influence regarding child poverty in Northern Ireland. The Child Poverty Alliance research highlights how childcare impacts on the rate of poverty in three ways. It states:

“Firstly the lack of available childcare is a barrier to employment for parents. Secondly, the high cost of childcare places pressure on family incomes. Thirdly, childcare is essential for early intervention, particularly regarding the developmental needs of children” (p.83).

Another finding from the research is that there are over 14,700 people who are economically inactive but would like to be in work but the lack of affordable childcare is a major barrier to employment.

Save the Children¹⁰ research also highlights how parents continually raise the cost of childcare as the reason for having to reduce spending on household goods or for some parents it has forced them into debt.

The Childcare Cost Survey highlights how the associated costs of childcare continues to have an impact on parents to reduce their hours, leave work or work at a financial loss.

You can see from the information stated above that affordable childcare is a major issue in Northern Ireland. As stated in the Children’s Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2015/16¹¹ childminding is parents preferred choice of childcare there needs to be major investment in this sector immediately.

The UK government has committed to doubling the amount of free childcare in England from 15 to 30 hours a week for working parents of three and four year olds from September 2017. This extended entitlement has the potential for real impact on the lives of families and supporting parents who wish to work, or to work more hours.

NICMA believe that the NI Executive should consider introducing the free 30 hr entitlement in Northern Ireland to help parents with the costs of childcare for 3 – 4 year olds and help alleviate the issues highlighted above. Although there is to be the introduction of tax free childcare this only covers 20% of total childcare costs and is considerably less than the 30 free hours in England.

⁹ Child Poverty Alliance, Beneath the Surface, Child Poverty in Northern Ireland (2014)

¹⁰ A Fair Start for Every Child. Why we must act now to tackle child poverty in the UK, Save the Children (2014)

¹¹ Children’s Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland, Department of Health, Information Analysis Directorate (2015 – 2016)

Accessibility

Findings from the Childcare Research Final Report (OFMDFM, 2014) highlight how there is an unmet need for childminding services across Northern Ireland. Findings from the Employers for Childcare: Choosing Childcare in Northern Ireland - Experiences of Local Parents (2016) research has also highlighted this problem and states that 15% of parents said there is a lack of childminding services. The accessibility of childcare and in particular childminding is a huge “social problem” due to this unmet need. This is therefore a huge challenge that needs to be solved.

Flexibility

Many parents are now working hours which can involve working shifts, weekends, overtime, on-call working etc., which can cause problems with childcare requirements. The Employers for Childcare: Choosing Childcare in Northern Ireland - Experiences of Local Parents research states that “in addition to problems with availability of childcare places, childcare provision can also be unaffordable and inflexible” (p.5). Although some childminders will adapt their working hours to allow for flexibility with parents working hours it can cause an issue with the number of vacancies they have available. Findings from this research highlight the restrictions childminders have with their vacancies, as it shows they may only have a few mornings or afternoons free or a limited number of days which is possible due to the flexibility allowed for other parents. However, for parents who require full time care or more hours in the week this causes an issue and may influence the number of parents who have stated in the research that there is a lack of childminding services available in their area. Taking this into consideration we need to consider whether the lack of childminding services is due to affordability, accessibility or flexibility.

Quality

This research has highlighted how the quality of all early years settings is a constant debate. There needs to be a change of outlook to ensure that childminding is seen as a career within the sector, with a clear pathway to progression linked to qualifications.

As there is no legal requirement for childminders to have any formal early years training other than health & safety, safeguarding children and paediatric first aid. NICMA believe that funding should be made available for all newly registered childminders to undertake a more comprehensive induction training package. Introducing this package as a mandatory requirement will not only increase childminders educational levels it will ensure they provide a high standard of provision which is vital for improving children’s educational standards, and hence contributes to raising workforce productivity and driving economic growth. This is reiterated in research by the Child Poverty Alliance (2014) who state that due to the links between childcare and development needs of children investing in good quality childcare services is beneficial for children, particularly those from disadvantaged areas.

Without the investment of funding to increase the number and quality of care provided by registered childminders and to ensure sustainability there is no doubt that the early years sector will lose a potentially available, affordable, sustainable, and high quality workforce.

As stated in the Child Poverty Alliance research: *Beneath the Surface: Child Poverty in Northern Ireland* (2014):

“Lack of childcare must be acknowledged as an underlying cause of poverty. This must begin with political recognition of childcare as both a social and economic issue” (p.93).

In this research NICMA have sought to be realistic, and to consider how all recommendations could be achieved and what impact they will have on the childminding sector as well as the local economy. NICMA do not underestimate the financial pressures that the Executive, the early year’s sector, parents and childminders are facing. NICMA believe the recommendations in this report are seen as efficient and effective investments in the future of children across Northern Ireland. It is therefore crucial that we all work together towards a shared vision where all children are cared for and provided with the opportunity to learn and develop in a safe, enjoyable home environment and where childminders are recognised and valued as skilled, qualified professionals.

NICMA
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