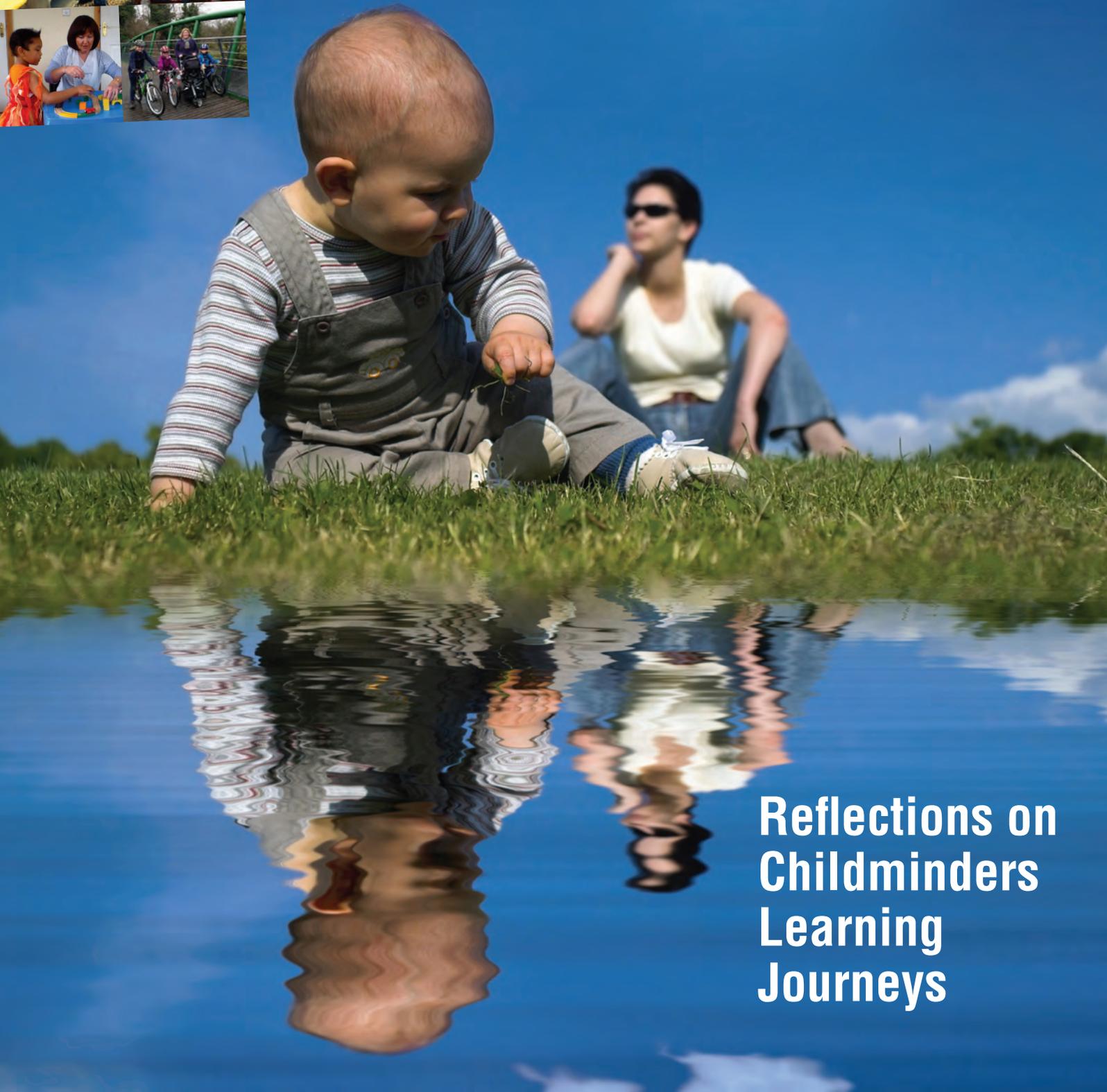


NICMA Level 3 Diploma
for Children's Care
Learning & Development



**'LEARNING IS A TREASURE THAT WILL
FOLLOW ITS OWNER EVERYWHERE.'**

CHINESE PROVERB



**Reflections on
Childminders
Learning
Journeys**

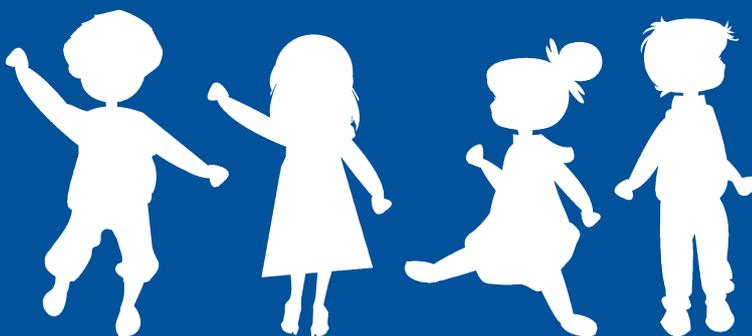
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Level



For the last two years during 2012 to date, NICMA – the Childminding Association have been piloting the **Level 3 Diploma for Children’s Care, Learning and Development** with a small group of registered Childminders. The Diploma is a nationally recognised work based qualification which requires that the childminder needs to be working with young children whilst completing their award. Achieving this qualification shows that they are competent to do the job and have the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to meet the standards required by the sector.

In order to gain their qualification, the Childminders have attended **14 full day training sessions** which developed their knowledge and understanding about children and young people across the 0 – 19 age range. They have also completed a range of assignments to build a portfolio of evidence and are observed directly working with the children in their care.





Susan Anderson is NICMA's Training Manager and along with Maeve Milne, NICMA's Training Officer has led the project from the outset.

Susan states: "NICMA believe that training does have an impact on the quality of service offered by a childminder. It is important that childminders provide the correct environment for children in order to promote their learning and development.

It is during the early months and years of a child's life that a high percentage of learning takes place. A childminders role is therefore extremely important and they should be there to foster and facilitate that learning. The uniqueness of the childminding setting is that this can be done informally within a home-based setting.

Children are active learners; they will interact with their environment which is why it is important that the childminder provides the appropriate learning opportunities to meet children's individual needs. Completing the level 3 Diploma for Children's Care Learning and Development helps childminders to do this. Its help them develop an awareness of young children and see them as competent co-constructors of their social, emotional and physical environment.

Working through the units of the Diploma helps childminders to fully comprehend the significance of the interactive process between themselves and the children they care for and the importance of the role they play. It also helps develop the childminders confidence in all aspects of the service they provide from forming close working relationships with parents to managing the business element of being a self employed practitioner."



Sandrine Montgomery

Registered Childminder, Bangor

The Diploma was very time consuming. There is a high standard to reach and it was important to put in the work required to reach that standard. It was not just about writing down reams and reams. It was about observing, reflecting and adjusting working practices as well as writing down our findings in detail.

For me, the most difficult part of undertaking this Diploma was to find the right balance between family, work and study. Susan, my mentor and tutor, was always very honest and upfront about the amount of time required to complete the work in order to obtain the Diploma. I suppose I underestimated the weight in those words. The year I started the Diploma, I did have too much on my plate. I had a 3 year old son, I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, did not take any maternity leave and worked 38 hours a week. Was this wise? Maybe not. Do I have any regrets I started the Diploma? None at all! Would I do it again? Most definitely!

“The Diploma in itself is not difficult. As a childcare practitioner who cares and has a passion for what I do, I knew what was expected of me. The course gave me the opportunity to demonstrate how I work and care for the children coming into my home.”

What did I take away from the Diploma?

The Diploma also gave me the opportunity to identify areas of development and improvement. That year, I helped a child going through a transition and implemented what I learnt from the Diploma. I witnessed great improvement in my childminding home. It was a very rewarding experience to put into practice what I learnt and see it work.

I strive to provide high standard bi-lingual childcare. Having completed the Level 3 Diploma, I am confident that I can improve upon a business practice that was already very good to start with. I can demonstrate to prospective clients that children in my childminding home are not just looked after. They are taught through fun and challenging activities tailored to their own abilities which allow them to develop and thrive. I would highly recommend any childminder serious about what they do to undertake this Diploma. But do not under estimate the amount of work and time required for it!





Maeve Milne is NICMA's Training Officer and Diploma Tutor

“The learners proved to be a very capable and dynamic group of people. From the beginning, they took responsibility for their own learning and for turning up on time and ready to work on all those Saturdays and Wednesdays during the whole 18 months. They supported each other at all times and there were many stories shared, not all to do with the Diploma! The standard of work was excellent and it really was a joy to work with learners who were self motivated.”

‘A Trainers Perspective’

From a training perspective the pilot scheme for the Level 3 Diploma was an exciting project. NICMA had already been involved in NVQ's in Childcare so in some ways the new Diploma was only a natural successor to that. However, writing 21 new units on every aspect of childcare in a short space of time was quite a challenge. Susan and I spent many hours in the boardroom in NICMA researching the latest information on child development and behaviour management along with inclusion and diversity and many other topics.

We did wonder what the uptake would be for childminders wanting to access the Diploma but we had a good response to the initial advertising and the first group of learners attended the Information Session in June 2012 and began their first session of the Diploma in September. The completion date of December 2013 seemed a very long time away when we were at that initial session but it came around very quickly.

One of the most satisfying things about the Diploma from a trainer's point of view is that the qualification is recognised throughout the UK and is the standard qualification for early years workers in all settings. The Quality Assurance procedures are rigorous so that as trainers, assessors and internal quality assurers, we know that we are working to the national standard. All work is quality assured within the assessment centre with which we work and then by the External Quality Assurer from City and Guilds.

It has also been good to watch the individual learners grow in confidence and knowledge throughout the process. As a trainer I have learnt from the childminders I have observed. Looking at their practice and their relationships with the children they mind just reaffirms my own conviction that childminding is an excellent form of childcare where children can be happy and grow in confidence, independence and knowledge under the guidance of knowledgeable and skilled adults.

Gail Trainor

Registered Childminder, Belfast

“Doing the Level 3 Diploma was a fantastic experience and I feel that everyone should have the opportunity to do so - not only will it help with your continued professional development, but the children you mind and their families will benefit and you get to meet a great bunch of other childminders and tutors who in my experience have become firm friends.”



I almost fell into childminding by accident - it was not a career I had ever considered before - but when one of my friends needed help with childcare and asked if I would help out I decided that if I was going to do it I would do it properly and get myself registered and insured. I had never worked with children before and had no childcare qualifications whatsoever so when I was setting up my business I looked at it from the point of view of what qualifications or experience I would want a childminder to have if they were going to be looking after my children. I had been childminding for almost 3 years when I was given the opportunity to do the Level 3 Diploma for Children's Care, Learning and Development and having done some sort of course from I registered I thought this would be an excellent way of furthering my professional development.

When the first day of the course dawned I was almost like a child at Christmas and excited to get started - everyone arrived with their new folders and pencil cases - it was like starting school all over again!! We spent the morning going over the requirements for the course, how to contact the tutors if we needed assistance, who to contact in the case of a dispute etc..... Then after lunch we got started into the course in earnest....

The first unit, Health and Safety, was fairly straight forward - it's stuff I'm doing everyday in my job; however when I got home and looked at the handouts we had been given,

with coursework set and assignments to be completed I quickly realised that there was going to be more research and written work to this Level 3 Diploma than I had realised - not to say that I panicked BUT I did have a "OMG ... what have I signed up for" moment. I put the books away, lit the fire, ordered chinese and had a wee glass of wine (it had been a long day after all). The next day I looked at the work with fresh eyes and yes it was going to be a lot of work but once I reread everything I knew I was more that capable of doing it..... and that's how the last 18 months have gone - I attend the classes, looked at the assignments, set the time aside each week to do the work (I tried to do it as quickly as possible because when I leave things to the last minute I always find something crops up and then it never gets done or I'm pulling an all nighter to get it done!!)... I'll not lie - there were still a few "OMG what have I done" moments when I was stuck or 'hitting my head off a brick wall' as I liked to call it, but a quick phone call to Susan always got me on the right track.

A the start of the course I remember thinking 18 months is a long time, but it goes in really quickly and I have learnt so much and my practice has benefitted in lots of different ways. It is also a great confidence boost when you approach a new topic like 'diversity and inclusion' or 'working in partnership with parents' and realise just how much you do and do well in your daily practice.



Lana Stewart

Registered Childminder, Belfast

As I worked through the first two to three units of the Diploma, I honestly asked, “Why am I putting myself through this”? However, I was determined nothing was going to beat me! I did find it tough at the start and found that certain units appealed to me and some I did find a struggle.

The course proved a huge learning curve, not only for me, but also for my childminding business. The parents of the children I care for took an interest in my course and offered support and encouragement. I also received a lot of support from my Tutor, Susan Anderson; she was very approachable and explained the reasons behind the questions and answers. She encouraged me and gave me the confidence, not to give up, but to continue with the units and steer me in the right direction i.e. web pages, learning about new skills and practices, theorists behaviours, legislation, health & safety - I could go on.

I felt very confident working with parents, talking about my ability and placing emphasis on the Policies and Procedures I use to help my business run smoothly. I could see my practice taking shape, my attitude to the children in my care improved as I learnt about the children’s feelings, emotional and age development.

I would recommend this course to anyone working with children. I honestly wish I had this knowledge when my own children were small. The experience and knowledge gained has proved to be a valuable, worthwhile and enjoyable experience.

I can say, I got a real sense of achievement and I am very proud of myself for completing the course.



“The course gave me a huge sense of pride as I had not been in education for nearly twenty years and seeing my portfolio take shape as I completed the units, made me eager to finish. I also enjoyed putting my new knowledge into practice in my childcare setting.”

Ruth Strain

Registered Childminder,
Ballynahinch



I began childminding 10 years ago, when my sons were 15, 13 and six. I love children, and enjoy being at home with my own children, so it seemed the obvious career choice for me.

I became a member of NICMA and realised that in addition to insurance, they offered support and training. When I had gained some hands-on experience, I decided to train to become a Quality First Accredited childminder. I then completed my Caring for Children with Additional Needs training, which I found really interesting.

Business was booming and I was really enjoying looking after the children in my care. Because I had gained such a lot from the training I had received, I decided that I would like to gain a Level 3 qualification in the future.

I went to the NICMA office for an introduction evening and discovered that I could complete this course while still meeting my childminding commitments.

With some of the units you are explaining how you meet the needs of the children, and are simply putting into words what you are already doing on a daily basis. There is also a unit on legislation which helps you to understand why certain policies and procedures are in place. I found the units on 'Child Development', 'Promoting Learning' and 'Communication' fascinating; and probably gained most knowledge from the unit on 'Equality and Inclusion' as it links not only to additional needs, but also to respect of other people's cultures, beliefs etc and helps you to appreciate the diversity in your community.

The tutors were lovely, very professional, but approachable. I felt that the first night I walked in to a room full of strangers, but soon I was looking forward to meeting up with the other girls, as friendships grew.

I am really glad that I completed this Diploma, I feel better prepared for the Minimum Standards and it has helped me to develop both personally and professionally.

"I spoke to my social worker, and she recommended that I complete the Level III Diploma for Children's Care, Learning and Development. It was great to complete the course through NICMA, as they understand the needs of childminders."

Louise Stephens

Registered Childminder, Comber

As a childminder for over twenty years I strive constantly to support children with their learning and development process in all stages of their development.

By undertaking the CCLD Level 3 Diploma I have extended my understanding and knowledge of children and their abilities in the learning process and I now work closer with the children and their parents and families to achieve positive outcomes that benefit the children as they go through their stages of development and learning in their lives.



As an accomplishment I have built confidence and self-esteem within myself, with a flexible attitude within my childminding business. Both the children and I have benefitted from the knowledge that I have been taught.

I would advise anyone in the childminding setting to undertake NICMA training with excellent tutors to provide knowledge and understanding and the importance it has and the impact on children and their families lives' in building a positive future.

“I feel that the course was a worthwhile achievement which has given me a more positive outcome on situations and how I can address them in the correct manner according to the policies and procedures that we as childminders have in place provided by NICMA.”

Julie Dilley

Registered Childminder, Bangor

I advertised on a small scale and took on my first set of children to look after. Having always been involved with people in my job I sensed the need to link up with other people for professional support. During my visits to NICMA I had the chance to meet with others in the same position as myself and conversations always reverted back to my job role. This led me to consider what training I could become involved in that would actually benefit me and the children in my care. It was recommended that the Diploma in Childcare would be something that I should give serious consideration to.

After some thought I decided to put my energy into the course. After the registration and first day at the course I will be honest and say I did wonder if I had taken on too much but as the group got to know each other we started to share experiences and ideas.

Coursework is a major aspect of any training and qualification and is probably the most demanding and time consuming aspect of the qualification. That said, it was really useful to combine the course with my day to day childminding duties as I could make the direct link between theory and my home setting. A lot of the coursework tasks were directly applicable and for me this was essential in the decision to keep going with the course.

From a personal point of view, you do need to be aware that there are costs in doing the course, financial as well as personal time. It has a huge affect on the time usually dedicated to the family and it is essential that you get the support you need from family and friends. I would advise anyone that they need to be very determined and show self discipline in getting into the routine of studying in the evening and at weekends. Looking back, I will be honest and say that at times it was challenging and time consuming but like anything that is worth doing, the advantages far outweigh the drawbacks. I really enjoyed the course, the friendships made and how it helped me to think more about the children in my care - which is ultimately the main reason why anyone should be involved in childminding. As well as that, the course has opened up other opportunities in terms of becoming involved in training others as well as leading on to further childcare qualifications. Give the course a go - you will surprise yourself at how much you can learn and achieve in 18 months. I certainly did!!!!



“My first point of contact was with NICMA. They were invaluable in the advice and practical support they provided on a variety of issues linked to my new role as a registered childminder.”

Jane Rutherford

Registered Childminder, Newtownabbey

I have been a registered childminder since May 2008. I decided to go into childminding after the birth of my second child, my main reason for this was to stay at home with my children. My previous employment included, retail management and administration, the only childcare experience that I had was coming from a family of five children and I was the eldest child. These courses have been very beneficial to me in my role, however I knew that one day I would need to complete my Level 3 Diploma as I would learn so much more.

An opportunity came up to complete the Level 3 Diploma as part of a pilot scheme with NICMA. I attended an information day about the course, we were advised of the course content and the amount of work that we could expect to put into it. Following much deliberation I decided that this is what I wanted to do and with the right support at home I could work my way through the course.





The course began in September 2012. I was excited about getting stuck in and working my way through the assignments. Each set of assignments came with a recommended study time, which was useful in terms of the time I needed to set aside each week to ensure they were completed on time and for our next monthly visit. As with most things at the start of something I had great motivation and enthusiasm. This helped get me through the first set of assignments as I got into the way of how things worked and how work should be recorded.

A few months in if I'm honest in some ways it did get tougher. What I found a challenge was the fact that I am a full time mum, working a full time job from home and doing all the usual tasks a parent has to do and then fit this around 2 nights plus study time. That was a big commitment and I am so grateful to my husband Lee for his support around the house, helping with the kids and also for being a great listener as I read back my course work to ensure it all made sense. Although tough at home as the cobwebs built up on the ceiling and my husband felt like a single parent at times, the assignments did get easier to research and write. I wondered at times if I was not putting as much effort in, but I think it was to do with a few things like: getting to know what the course facilitators expected from you (their support was also excellent!), some of the learning was linked and then there was occasion's when the units could be cross referenced in some way (this was always good!).

During the course I enjoyed some units more than others. My favourite topics included those around child development; how to support and promote it, equality and inclusion, safeguarding and health & safety. My least favourite topic was writing about the law, although I learnt lots from it!

Overall I have found the course beneficial in my current role as it has given me a better understanding of children and young people from how they develop, to how I can promote and support this and the importance of building good relationships with them. I now understand the importance of getting to know children and young people as individuals because all their needs are different. This learning experience has been hard work but rewarding and if you feel that you can commit to the study time that is required then I would definitely recommend it. Good luck!!

*“Since becoming a childminder I have always taken my job seriously and I’ve carried out the role out to the best of my ability in a professional manner. **To help me do this and for my own personal development I have attended many training and development courses over the years through NICMA, Sure Start and the Childcare Partnership**”.*

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