

# CHILDMINDER SUSTAINABILITY IN ENGLAND AND WALES



Verity Campbell-Barr, Jan Georgeson, Katherine Gulliver and Ulrike Hohmann

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

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# Introduction

## Setting the Context

Data on childminding places in England and Wales shows a steady decline in the number over the last twenty years. While the number of childminders grew up until 1996, the number of childminding places has now been surpassed by other those providing other childcare and early years (CC&EY) services. In England, between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, 544 childminders joined the Ofsted<sup>1</sup> register, but 1,325 left (Office for Standards in Education, 2019b). In addition, between 2017 and 2018 initial applications to be registered fell from 3,950 to 2,980. In Wales, there were 2,201 childminders with 16,184 places registered with CIW<sup>2</sup> in March 2018, a decline of 139 providers and a loss of 347 places on the previous years. It reflects 141 newly registered childminders with 1,159 places and 270 providers leaving the sector resulting in the loss of 1,601 places (Welsh Government 2019a). Other childcare providers do not show a net loss for the same period.

The decline in the number of childminders is set against a policy backdrop that has seen political and financial investment in the CC&EY sector over the last 25 years. While investment has inevitably fluctuated during different periods, there has been a combination of incentives for parents to access CC&EY places and developments in the provision of services, including for childminders. For example, parents are able to access 30 hours of free childcare on the prerequisite of meeting certain conditions. However, there is evidence that not all parents are aware of the details of the 30 hour offer, such as splitting the hours between different CC&EY providers and taking hours across the whole year. Further, just under a quarter did not know that the offer was eligible when using a childminder (Department for Education, 2018a). In addition, parents are not always informed about childminders being able to offer funded places on behalf of Local Authorities, health visitors and children's centres (Griffin and Hevey, 2018). Therefore, the provision of funding cannot be seen to equate with its take up and use.

The lack of parental awareness about childminders is somewhat surprising given other policy developments to align childminders with the wider CC&EY sector. For example, Ofsted in England and CIW in Wales inspect childminders, along with other CC&EY providers against a common framework. Further, childminders, while being required to undertake an introductory course in childminding, have been able to access higher-level qualifications, including graduate qualifications in line with other private, voluntary and independent CC&EY providers. Data from the Childcare and Early Years Survey (Department for Education, 2018b) shows that 69 per cent of childminders held a Level Three qualification and nine per cent were educated to degree level.

Relational agency, the 'capacity to offer support and to ask for support from others' (Edwards, 2005: 168) is important in establishing and maintaining professional agency; for childminders, however, this is variable; connections to other childminders and associated support services fluctuate and can contribute to feelings of loneliness. Often childminders are not aware of the support that is available, such as on-line forums or locally established support groups (Webster, 2017). It can also be difficult to access training due to the distance, travel expenses and the time of courses (Faulkner and Coates,

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<sup>1</sup> Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

<sup>2</sup> Care Inspectorate Wales

2013), although training can mitigate against feelings of isolation (Barker, 2012). Support from local authorities varies, ranging from providing networking opportunities, training and advice to not being available (Evans, 2013, Skipp and Hopwood, 2017). However, some childminders have close-knit support networks of other childminders (Ang and Tabu, 2018).

Alongside the variable relational agency of childminder, access to start up grants have fluctuated in the last 25 years, currently being present in Wales, but not England. The Department of Education (GOV.UK, 2019) estimate that the start-up costs for becoming a childminder could be approximately £600, accounting for DBS checks, First Aid courses, insurance and initial training. Despite these initial costs, during the application process in England, 14 per cent in 2017 and 16 per cent in 2018 of potential childminders withdrew from registering (Office for Standards in Education, 2019c). Data from England also indicates that the registration process can be a lengthy one. An initial inspection should take place within 30 months of signing up to the Early Years Register with a decision on the outcome within 12 weeks. In 2017, this was achieved for 54 per cent of applications from childminders but declined to 44 per cent the following year (Office for Standards in Education, 2019c).

Childminders also find Ofsted inspections and connected requirements stressful (Crosland, 2016, Graven, 2019). There are concerns that the high quality of their practice is not recognised and that the inspection is paper driven (Evans, 2013). There is also a wider perception of an increase in paperwork (Stephenson, 2016). Even where perceptions of paper work are not borne out by expectations from Ofsted or CIW, they are presented as a potential contributor to the decline in numbers.

Reasons for the decline in childminders have also been associated with a perceived undervaluing of their role by society (Griffin and Hevey, 2018). The stronger emphasis on very young children's early education alongside a perception of childminding as more caring (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) may influence both the social value of childminding and parents' choices on CC&EY services, although it should be noted that there is evidence that some parents are drawn to the caring, home-like nature of childminding (Fauth et al., 2012, Griffin and Hevey, 2018).

The financial feasibility of childminding is inevitably associated with their ability to fill their places, which can vary geographically. However, it is also associated with their business skills and ability to set fees and associated costs, claiming them from parents and competition from other providers (Bell et al., 2005, Harries et al., 2004). Evidence demonstrates that childminders generally charge lower fees than other CC&EY providers. In 2018 the mean unit costs (costs per hour and child) were £3.42 for childminder settings compared to a mean hourly staff income of £7.46 for all other CC&EY settings (Cattoretti et al., 2019).

In general, childminders are satisfied with their work and cherish their work with children. Despite a perceived low social status, childminders do view themselves as professionals, and this is often linked to the qualifications they hold, their experience as parents and the length of time worked as a childminder (Otero and Melhuish, 2015, Gelder, 2002). Childminding is a flexible service that can respond to the needs of children and families (Evans, 2013, Gelder, 2002, Skipp and Hopwood, 2017), with a distinct pedagogical approach (Ang et al., 2017). The flexibility of childminders can mean they are well suited to supporting children with Special Educational Needs (SEND) (England) or Additional Learning Needs (ALN) (Wales), as well as children and families who have been identified as 'at risk' (Griffin and Hevey, 2018). There is also evidence to suggest "the impact of childminder use on verbal development may be most influential at [age] two to three" (Melhuish and Gardiner 2018 p61).

Despite the potential rewards and benefits of childminding and childminders, the decline in numbers risks childminding becoming a dying profession. Not only does the decline in numbers risk

undermining policy commitments for the provision of CC&EY services, it also risks a loss of the responsive and unique pedagogical approach identified. Given the risks, a three stage research project was undertaken to establish an up-to-date understanding of childminder sustainability in England and Wales.

1. Desk-based research to review existing data on registrations and de-registrations of childminders and use of childminding services, alongside a review of relevant literature (see [Appendix One](#)).
2. Survey of childminders and relevant stakeholders to consider reasons for the decline in childminders, associated social understandings of the role of childminders and innovative approaches to childminding support.
3. Case studies to generate a more in-depth understanding of perceptions on what is influencing the decline in childminders and matters relating to supply and demand.

The research was undertaken sequentially, enabling the findings from each stage to inform the next. As such, the review of literature shaped the design of the survey and the survey provided the areas for further exploration in the case studies. In what follows the methodology section, is a thematic analysis of childminding sustainability in England and Wales.



# Research with Childminders and Stakeholders

## Methods

Following the review of literature, an online survey was developed. The survey sought to capture the views of stakeholders on a range of topics and themes drawn from the literature, before going on to consider the demographics of the respondents and questions that related to their specific role. As such, the questionnaire divided into two parts following the generic questions on views of childminding – one for childminders and one for stakeholders who provided some form of support service for childminders. Details of the generic and specific questions are outlined below before summarising the rationale behind the questionnaire design; dissemination of the questionnaire; and the approach to analysis.

A series of case studies were also undertaken in different Local Authority areas in order to consider themes that had emerged from the analysis of the questionnaire. The case studies did not seek to be representative or comparative, but provided an opportunity to explore issues in more depth with both childminders and stakeholders. Narrative descriptions and illustrative quotations have been employed to share case study data, rather than extended accounts of provision in each location. This approach preserves the ethical commitments to confidentiality made to participants and is also methodologically appropriate when adopting a sociocultural-historical approach to analysis; what happens in each Local Authority is so much shaped by local constraints and affordances that any attempt at comparison would be inappropriate without an in depth study of the history of provision in that area, which was beyond the scope of this project

## Generic Questions

The generic questions in the questionnaire were divided into sections on childminding as a:

- Profession
- Form of employment
- Family and community role

Later questions also considered wider perceptions on childminding as a profession. Additional questions were also included in relation to barriers to entering childminding and reasons for leaving childminding before asking what could make childminding more appealing as a profession.

Demographic questions collated information on the country in which the person worked (England or Wales), the local authority in which they were located, age, gender, qualification level, years of experience and role.

## Questions on Role

Having obtained data on the role of the participants, the questionnaire branched to focus on two core groups – childminders and stakeholders, such as local authority staff, trainers and researchers. Questions relating to childminders sought to find out more as to who accessed their services and their

experiences of providing services. Questions for stakeholders explored the wider support that is available to childminders.

It was anticipated that the survey would reach a large number of those working in local authorities, but the overall response rate from those working in local authorities was low (see section on [support services](#)), offering limited scope for subgroup analysis. Therefore, there is no analysis of the different local authorities and limited subgroup analysis of the different stakeholders. However, later qualitative case studies offered the opportunity to explore in more depth the work of local authorities and other stakeholders.

## Question Design

Questions were broadly Likert Scales. Likert Scales enable an investigation into attitudes relating to a specific item, seeking to ascertain the intensity of feelings across the range of items identified (Bryman, 2012). Respondents were offered a series of statements that they were asked to rate using the scale:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

A middle position in the ratings was not provided to avoid participants from 'going down the middle' and therefore offering data that was neither positive nor negative. The lack of middle position enables the analysis to ascertain more clearly where attitudes to the statements are favourable or not.

The Likert questions were followed by the opportunity for respondents to provide open responses, whereby participants could write text to offer additional thoughts on the questions posed. The open responses offered the opportunity for the data to reach beyond that which was identified in the literature review.

## Ethics

All respondents were made aware at the start of the questionnaire of the lead researchers for the questionnaire (University of Plymouth), and the research funder (PACEY). The opening statement indicated that the survey was based on the analysis of existing literature and that the collating of demographic data was for the purposes of subgroup analysis. Participants were assured of their anonymity, while being reminded that due to the anonymous nature of the survey it would not be possible to withdraw their data, with all data being held securely for a period of ten years. Information relating to the Principle Investigator and how the research would be disseminated were also provided to support participants in being able to access the findings.

Participants were asked to respond as to whether or not they gave consent to participate in the survey. While 99.14% (4,388) consented (with 0.86% stating they did not wish to take part), the opening questions on views of childminding only received 3385 responses indicating that just over 1000 respondents chose to activate their right to withdraw despite giving consent to participate in the survey.

## Dissemination

The survey was disseminated electronically via a number of mechanisms:

- Email bulletin to PACEY members
- Email to local authority contacts held by PACEY
- As a pop up for those visiting the PACEY website
- Social media
  - PACEY Facebook page
  - PACEY Twitter accounts
  - Twitter accounts of the research team

In addition, word-of-mouth and prior media coverage of the research meant that many were anticipating the survey being launched.

The survey was launched on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2019 and stayed open for a period of a month.

## Analysis

As discussed, 4388 people began participation in the survey, but only 3385 entered data. Therefore, those who had not entered data were removed from the analysis tables. An additional two responses were removed where the data did not go beyond the opening questions.

The initial analysis focused on all respondents before dividing them into different subgroups. The two core subgroups were childminders and non-childminders, with childminders being further divided into more subgroups. There were 3096 childminder respondents. Childminders were therefore divided into subgroups based upon:

- Time in childminding
- Qualification level
- Plans to leave childminding

Further subgroups were not possible for the non-childminder group, although some analysis was undertaken to focus on those who could be classified as clearly offering 'support services' to childminders. Throughout the discussion of the data, details of the subgroup sample sizes are detailed.

Comparisons between those responding from England and Wales are limited to where such comparisons are pertinent, such as questions relating to registration and paper work.

In addition to the analysis of the quantitative questions, the open questions were analysed utilising Nvivo. Nvivo enabled members of the project team to identify core themes coming from the open responses and code them accordingly. The first two hundred open responses were analysed for themes until a point of saturation, whereby no new themes were emerging, was reached. Therefore, the presentation of the open responses represents these core themes as being representative of the sample as a whole.

## The Respondents

The respondents to the survey were mostly from England (89.29%), with 9.46% coming from Wales and 1.26% stating other. As discussed in the literature review there were 39000 childminders registered in England and 2201 in Wales, providing a combined population of 41201, of which 5% are from Wales. Therefore, the sample is slightly more representative of Welsh childminders than is evident in the registration data.

Respondents were also largely female (97.78%) and predominantly over 41 years of age. The female nature of the CC&EY workforce is well documented, with recent evidence also signalling that there is an aging population (Bonetti, 2018). While it is not possible to make direct comparisons with Bonetti's analysis, as her work is focused on England and there are subtle differences in how the age groups have been analysed, the suggestion is that the sample presented here is more mature than that of the wider CC&EY workforce. Accurate data on the age of childminders could not be obtained for all of England and Wales, but the sample generated from the online questionnaire illustrates that a challenge facing childminding is its aging population.

As will be discussed in later stages of the analysis, the age of the participants may have a bearing on the responses provided. As such, the subgroup analysis looks to explore differences in the age groups present.

*Figure 1 Age of Respondents*

16 to 19 years old	0.12%
20 to 30 years old	4.41%
31 - 40 years old	24.14%
41 - 50 years old	34.73%
51 - 60 years old	29.39%
61 + years old	7.21%

In keeping with the age of the respondents, the sample was also experienced in working in CC&EY services. Again, later stages of the analysis will look in more detail at experience in relation to other responses, particularly focusing on newly registered childminders to see what might be the features that attracted them to childminding.

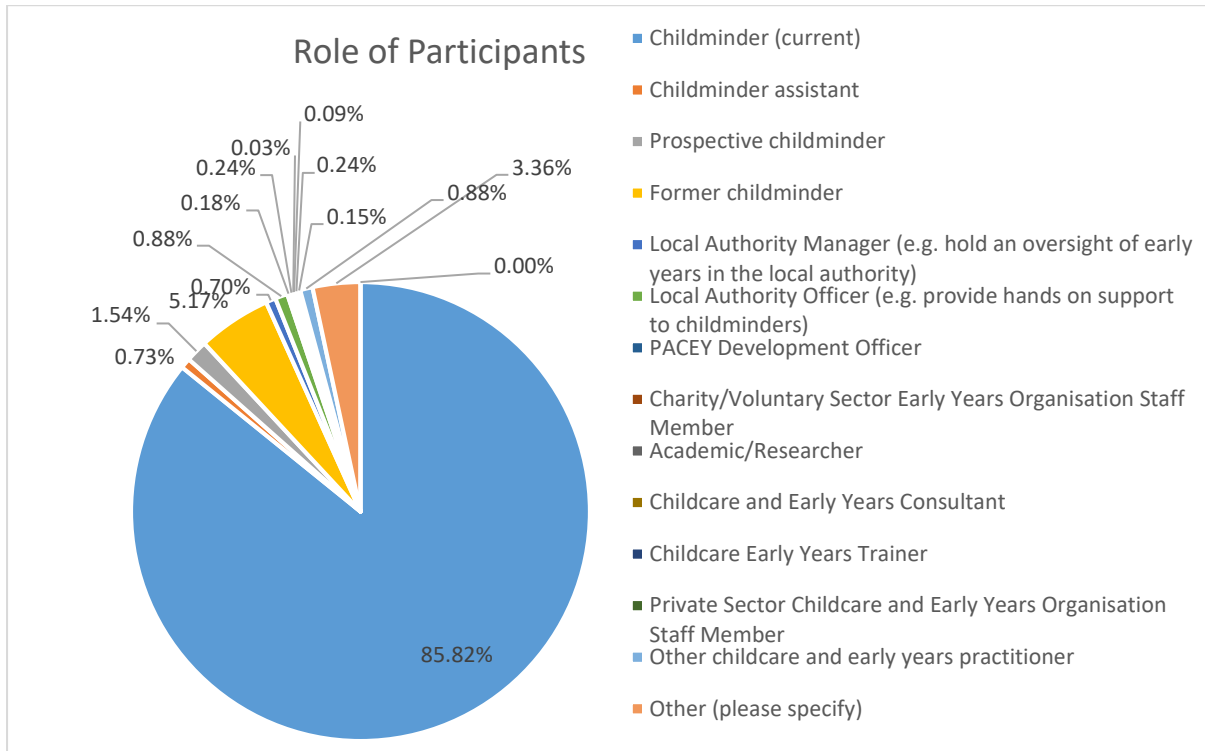
*Figure 2 Years of Experience*

up to 1 year	2.54%
2 - 5 years	11.68%
6 - 10 years	15.97%
11 - 15 years	18.94%
16 - 20 years	15.37%
20 + years	35.51%

Most of the respondents to the survey were childminders. While the original intention of the survey was to ascertain the views of those who work in local authorities or other support capacity roles in

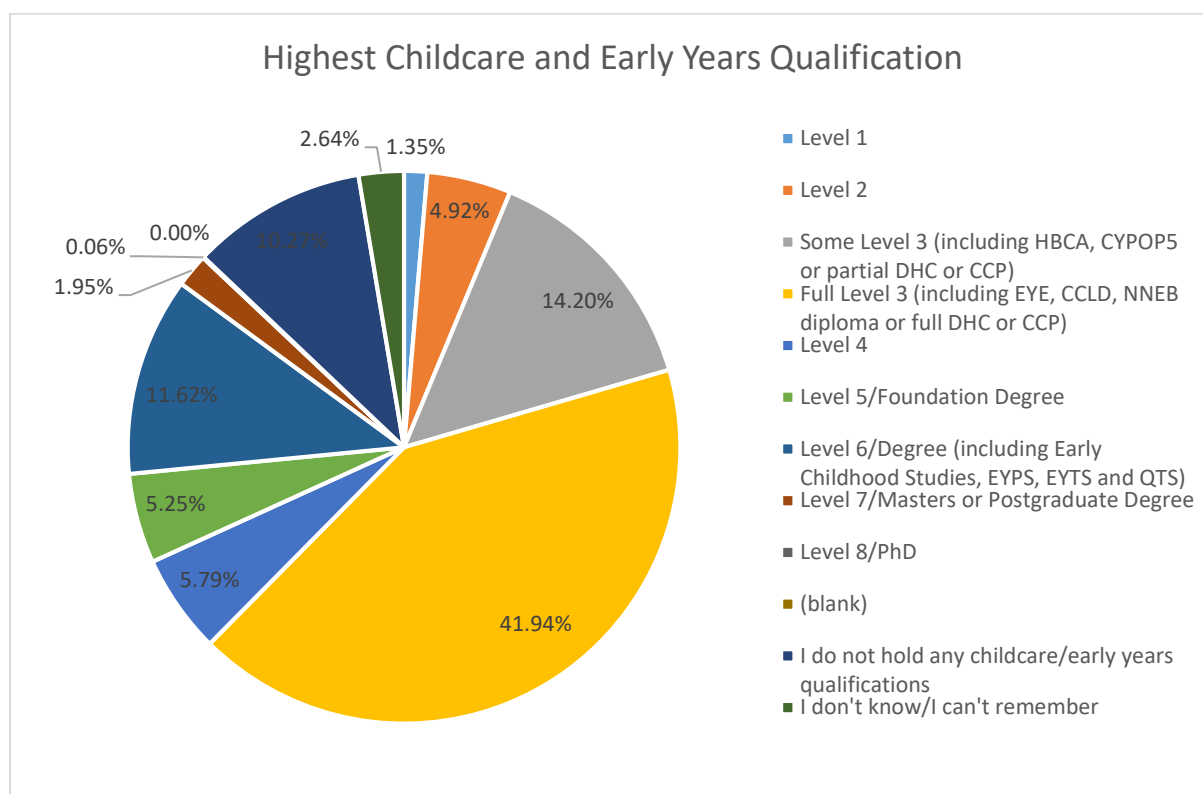
relation to childminding, it was evident from the outset of the research that childminders were keen to be involved and this is reflected in their response rate.

Figure 3 Role of Participants



Most of the respondents held a Level 3 qualification (either Full or some aspects of the Level 3). A Level 3 qualification is higher than is required of childminders, reflecting a wider trend for those working in CC&EY services to gain qualifications above and beyond what is expected of them (Brind et al., 2014).

Figure 4 Qualification of Participants



### The Subgroups

The childminders who responded to the survey (N=3097) were also asked additional questions about being a childminder. The childminders who responded were predominantly current childminders.

	Count of Response
Childminder (current)	91.83%
Childminder assistant	0.78%
Former childminder	5.68%
Prospective childminder	1.71%

Among these childminders 14.4% employ an assistant, 5.52% are former childminders, 4.88% describe themselves as co-working childminders, whereby they combine work hours with other childminders regularly to meet parental demand, 1.29% are prospective childminders and a small number (0.01%) are childminding assistants.

Most childminders had attended an introductory/pre-registration course (84.87%), with 11.89% saying they did not attend such a course and 3.24% being unsure or could not remember. While childminders in Wales are required to have undertaken pre-registration training this is not the case in England. However, many of the childminders who responded to the survey have been working in childminding for 20 or more years and requirements for pre-registration training would have been

both different and variable depending on where a person was registering. Further, given that some respondents were not childminders (instead being other stakeholders), there would be no requirement for them to have undertaken pre-registration training. Therefore, there was no expectation of a positive response from across the participants.

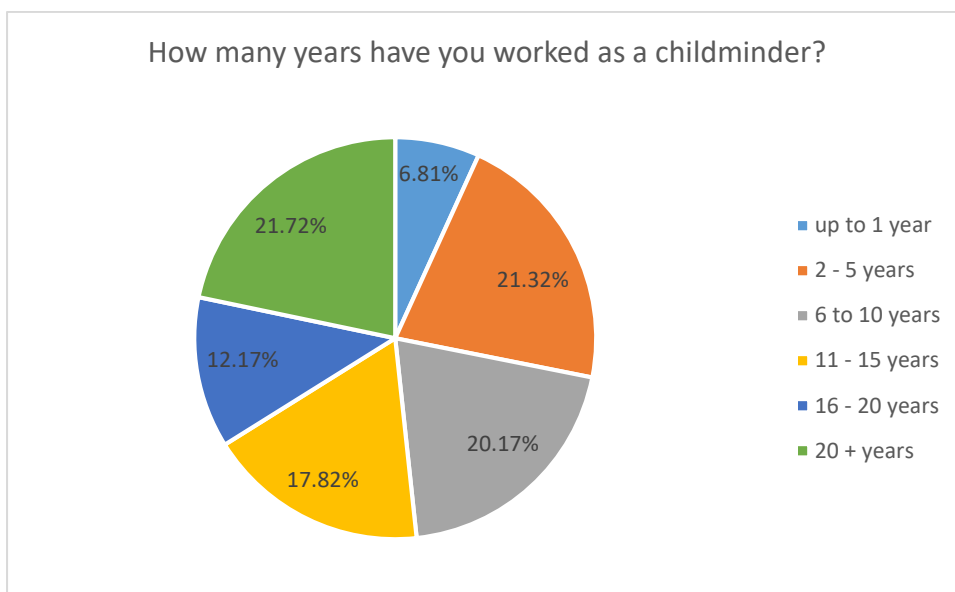
The childminders largely worked with children from birth to four years of age, with most indicating that they worked with more than one age group.

*Figure 5 Age Groups That Childminders Work With*

Age Group	Percentage
Birth to 2 years	22.19%
2 to 3 years	23.50%
3 to 4 years	21.32%
4 to 8 years	18.11%
8 to 11 years	12.60%
12 years and over	2.27%

The respondents were also largely very experienced, with over half (51.7%) having 11 or more years working as a childminder. Given that the research is interested in the sustainability of childminding, having a sample that has worked for a long time in childminding may distort the data. For this reason, later stages of the analysis will look at those who have been in childminding for only a year and those that identify as former childminders to explore these groups in more depth.

*Figure 6 Years Working as a Childminder*



The following subgroups were identified for childminders only:

*Figure 7 Table of Subgroups*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
New Childminders	Up to a year working as a childminder	206
Experienced Childminders	20+ years working as a childminder	657
Level 1 & 2	Level 1 & 2	202
Level 3	Level 3 (encompassing those with some Level 3 e.g. HMCA, CUPOS or partial DHC, CCP and Full Level 3 e.g. EYE, CCLD, NNEB diploma or full DHC, CCP)	1788
Level 4+	Level 4, Level 5 (including Foundation Degree), Level 6 (including Early Childhood Studies, EYPS, EYTS and QTS), Level 7 (Masters or other postgraduate), Level 8 (PhD)	712

Those with no qualification or who were not sure what their qualification level is, are not included in the qualification sub-groups.

It should be noted that the categories are self-reported by childminders. It is also possible that participants may fall into more than one subgroup. For example, a person may be both a new childminder and someone who has a Level 4 or above qualification. Further, the different sizes of the subgroups should be taken into account when considering the reliability of the data. For example, the new childminder group and low qualifications group should be seen as indicative due to their small sizes.

Years of experience is in relation to working in childminding. However, it is acknowledged that a number of childminders reported having worked in other CC&EY services, providing them with other forms of experience where they were working with young children.

The below table compares the qualification levels of new and experienced childminders to the overall sample. Initially there looks to be some discrepancies when looking at the Level 3 qualifications, but if both the 'some' and 'full' Level 3s are combined the differences between new childminders and all respondents is minimal, whereby 50% of new childminders and 56.14% of the whole sample hold some kind of Level 3 qualification. A higher proportion of experienced childminders hold a Level 3 qualification than the overall sample, but there is a higher number of new childminders entering childminding with a degree level qualification. The trend for new childminders to have a degree is encouraging for childminding as a profession and for the quality of childminding services and reflects the wider trend reported earlier that those working in childcare and early years are obtaining higher qualifications than minimum standards require. [Later analysis](#) also indicates that the movement of professionals around the CC&EY sector is variable, whereby there are examples of teachers coming into childminding – contrary to a view of childminding as a starter profession.



Figure 8 Experience and Qualifications Compared

	% of New Childminders	% of Experienced Childminders	All Respondents
Level 1	0.97%	1.52%	1.35%
Level 2	4.85%	4.41%	4.92%
Some Level 3 (including HBCA, CYPOP5 or partial DHC or CCP)	26.21%	49.16%	14.20%
Full Level 3 (including EYE, CCLD, NNEB diploma or full DHC or CCP)	23.79%	10.96%	41.94%
Level 4	4.37%	6.09%	5.79%
Level 5/Foundation Degree	2.43%	4.57%	5.25%
Level 6/Degree (including Early Childhood Studies, EYPS, EYTS and QTS)	17.96%	5.02%	11.62%
Level 7/Masters or Postgraduate Degree	3.88%	0.30%	1.95%
Level 8/PhD	-	-	0.06%
I do not hold any childcare/early years qualifications	10.19%	14.31%	10.27%
I don't know/I can't remember	5.34%	3.65%	2.64%

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the data also indicates that new childminders are largely younger than the overall sample, whereas experienced childminders are more mature.

Figure 9 Experience and Age Compared

	New Childminders	Experienced Childminders	All Respondents
16 to 19 years old	-	0.15%	0.12%
20 to 30 years old	17.48%	0.00%	4.41%
31 - 40 years old	57.28%	0.15%	24.14%
41 - 50 years old	16.99%	12.63%	34.73%
51 - 60 years old	7.77%	61.34%	29.39%
61 + years old	0.49%	25.72%	7.21%

## Case study respondents

To supplement the survey data thematic case studies were planned to explore issues that were emerging from the data. Key informants were identified who would help us to frame questions; they were approached and interviewed over the phone to explore specific areas in more depth. Specific details of the individuals are limited to preserve anonymity, but include representatives of PACEY, and inspection agencies (Ofsted in England and CIW in Wales). Departments for education were approached but were unable to respond because of restrictions in place during and after the December 2019 election.

In addition, ten local authorities were targeted with requests to interview key informants within the local authorities (either face to face or over the phone as appropriate) and conduct focus groups with childminders. Local authorities were selected based on the response rates in the survey, in particular targeting those areas with low response rates. The targeting of the low response areas aimed to extend the geographical spread of the research, targeting areas where there was less known about childminding provision and support. Recruitment of local authority staff to the study was via Local Authority Websites and personal contacts; recruitment of childminders was through invitations from Local Authority staff as part of regular communication or as a special request. The process of contacting local authorities provided an unanticipated source of data in itself. Often the research team struggled to identify the name of a contact on the local authority the website who might be able to provide information specifically about childminding, indicating that an existing or prospective childminder in need of support or advice might also struggle to find someone to contact.

Response to invitations varied markedly between local authorities; three authorities participated fully; five did not respond to our invitations; two authorities directed us to a central contact, who also did not respond. Comments from those Local Authorities who cooperated in the case studies suggested that non-engagement with the study was likely to be due to pressure of work and directives to protect the workloads of hard-pressed local authority staff. The Local Authorities who participated were motivated by their interest in the work of childminders in their area and welcomed the opportunity to explore this further.

In the three participating local authorities, childminders were invited to take part in focus groups. In one authority this was supplemented by face-to-face interviews and in another by online questionnaires following up on the interview questions. Websites were also analysed for ease of access and documents and support materials shared. Queries arising after discussions were addressed through follow up email correspondence. Care was taken in use of data from the interviews that individuals were not identifiable. This involved the removal of details about qualifications, provision and careers which might otherwise have breached confidentiality.

Figure 10 Summary of Local Authorities

	Local Authority staff interviewed	Childminders participating in focus group	Childminders interviewed	Other sources of information
City (England)	7	4	2	Website
Town (England)	1	11		Website Hub documents 5 questionnaire responses
Urban (Wales)	3			Website

The thematic case studies were designed to build up layers of information, following local strategies to respond to the issues of childminder sustainability. In the discussion section of the data, we present the overview of the survey, illustrated with examples from these layers of investigation.

The themes explored for the case studies were:

- Childminding as a profession (including professional journeys to becoming a childminder)
- Registration, regulation and paperwork
- Support structures and systems
- Recruitment, retention, reputation and managing numbers on roll
- Childminders' contribution to promotion of social mobility

Four key informants were interviewed in November and December 2019, while the local authority case studies took place between January 2020 and March 2020. The timing of the case studies overlapped with the spread of COVID19. Therefore, in line with the general guidance on measures to restrict the spread of the virus, data collection ceased on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, preventing some additional interviews and focus groups from being undertaken.

## Continuing Challenges of Childminding

All respondents were asked questions relating to their views on childminding as a profession, as a form of employment and its social role. The questions provided statements against which participants rated their views. The findings indicate that many of the challenges identified in the literature review have not been addressed or resolved, with the discussion of the findings being structured around the core challenges of:

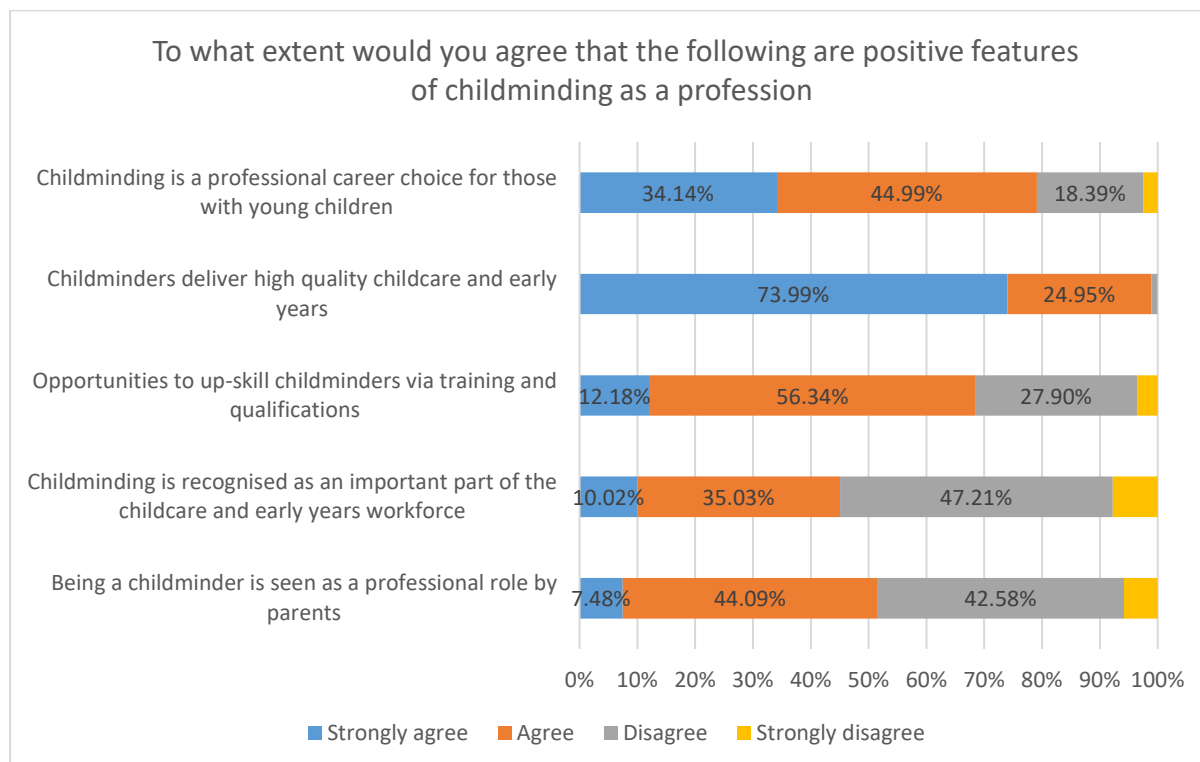
- Professionalisation
- Registration and paperwork
- Sustainability

Despite these ongoing challenges, the findings also demonstrate the rewards of childminding. The discussion of each theme considers the responses from the sample as a whole before considering the specific views of the childminding subgroups.

## Childminding as a Profession

Respondents were asked a number of questions pertaining to the professional status of childminding that demonstrated that while those with a stake in childminding are proud of the high quality services that they provide, they did not believe that childminding was more widely recognised as a professional role.

Figure 11 Positive Features of Childminding as a Profession



Among all respondents, it was evident that delivering high quality CC&EY services was seen as the prime feature.

Figure 11 also demonstrates that the respondents did not think that childminding was recognised as an important part of the CC&EY workforce or that parents recognised childminding as a professional role. These findings were echoed when asking respondents to what extent they thought different subsets of the population understood the work of a childminder.

*Figure 12 The Extent with Which Working in Childminding is Understood as a Profession*

	Mean	Lowest Score	Highest Score	Mode
To what extent do you think the general public understand the realities of working as a childminder (where 0 is nothing and 100 is fully understands)?	28.89%	0	100	20% (8.3% of all respondents)
To what extent do you think parents/carers understand the realities of working as a childminder (where 0 is nothing and 100 is fully understands)?	44.74%	0	100	40% (6% of all respondents)
To what extent do you think the childcare and early years community understand the realities of working as a childminder (where 0 is nothing and 100 is fully understands)?	46.95%	0	100	80% (4.2% of all respondents)

Figure 12 clearly demonstrates that the respondents did not think that the work of childminders was understood. Although the average is higher when looking at parents and other CC&EY practitioners, overall there is an indication that childminding is not an understood role.

The findings echo those of the literature review, whereby despite the establishment of the National Childminding Association (now PACEY) over 40 years ago, and a number of policy developments to put childminders on a level playing field with other CC&EY providers (such as common curriculums and inspection frameworks), there is still a perception of a lack of status and understanding of childminding.

#### [New and Experienced Childminders views of the Profession](#)

In comparing the views of new and experienced childminders on childminding as a profession it is possible to see that experienced childminders are largely more positive than new childminders. Although some differences are not very pronounced, more experienced childminders were more like to strongly agree (80.52%) than new childminders (66.99%) that childminders deliver high quality childcare and early years services. Experienced childminders were also more likely to strongly agree or agree that childminding is seen as a profession by parents (58.75% of experienced childminders and 49.51% of new), with the difference being less pronounced when looking at whether childminding is a recognised as a profession by the rest of the CC&EY sector (48.06% of experienced childminders and

50.99% of new). The findings suggest that time in childminding equates to more positive views of its professional role. While it should be noted that perspectives on professionalism according to time as a childminder are largely divided between those who are positive (strongly agree and agree responses) and those who are negative (disagree and strongly disagree responses), the data indicates that childminding is seen as a less desirable profession by new childminders. This may have implications for why people do not choose childminding as a profession.

Figure 13 New Childminders' Views of the Profession

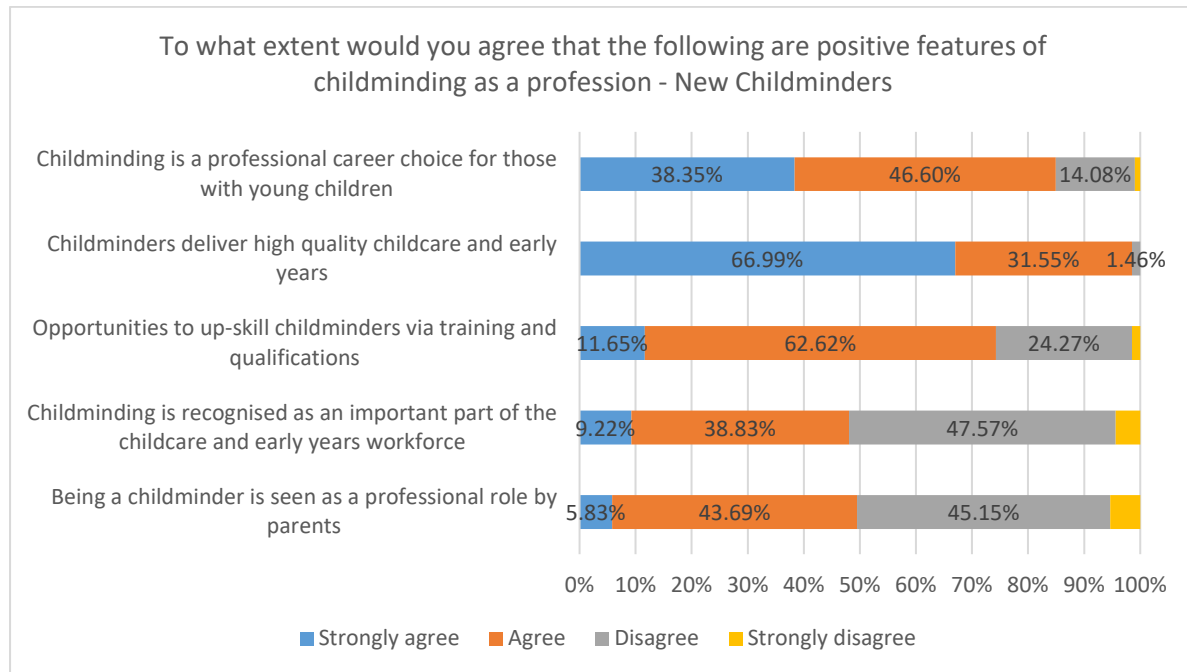
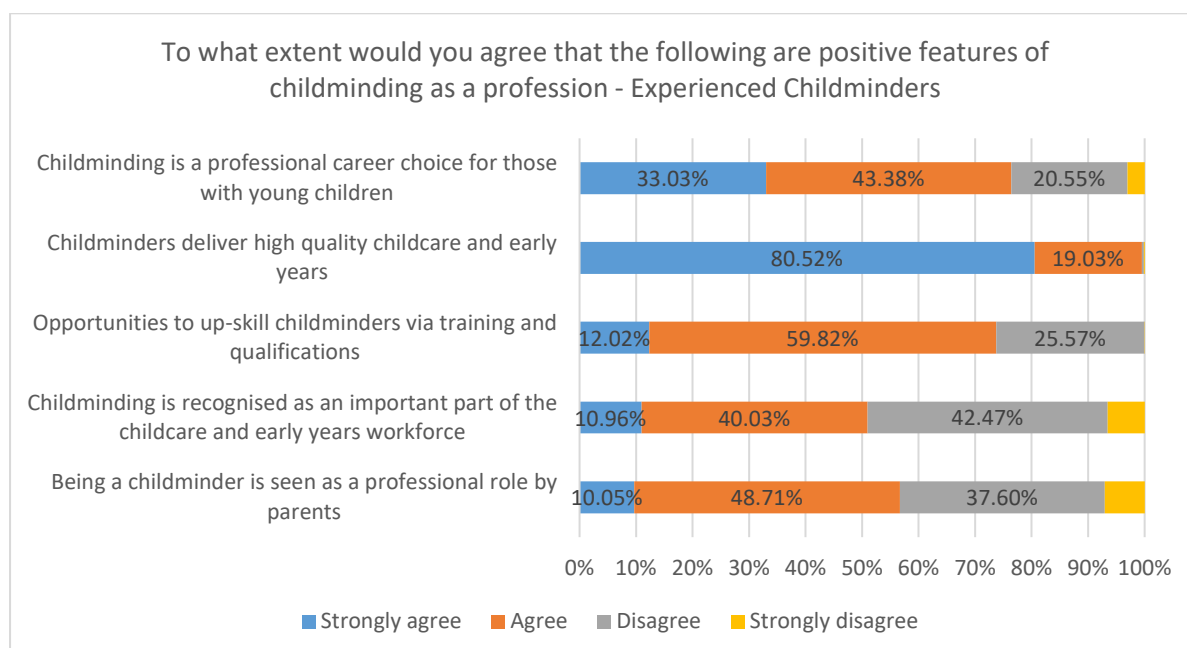


Figure 14 Experienced Childminders Views of the Profession



### Views of the Profession by Qualification

In reviewing the responses that related most clearly to perceptions of childminding as a profession by qualification level it is possible to see a progression in the number who responded 'disagree' in relation to their qualification level. As such, those with higher qualifications are more likely to respond negatively to childminding being seen as a professional role by parents and a recognised part of the CC&EY workforce than Level 1&2 or Level 3 respondents.

Figure 15 Being a childminder is Seen as a Professional Role By Parents by Qualification Level

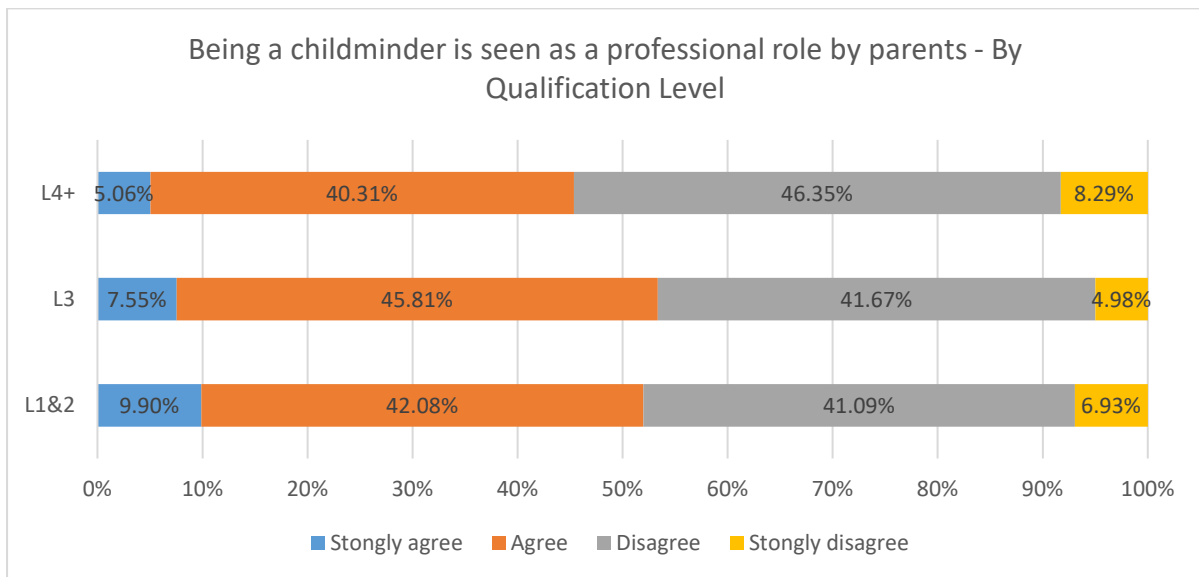
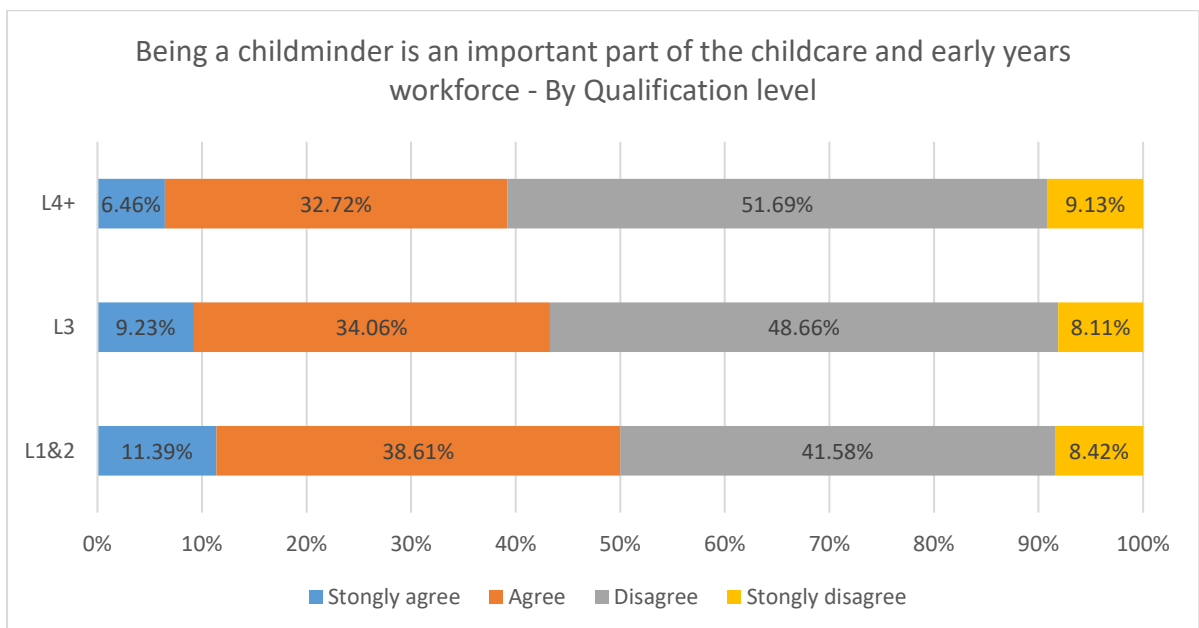


Figure 16 Being a Childminder is an Important Part of the Childcare and Early Years Workforce



While the data indicates that perceptions of childminding as a profession are more likely to be negative the higher a person’s qualification, this could be because higher level qualifications often require a greater degree of criticality and reflection generating a more critical stance. Further, despite the more negative views of the Level 4+ childminders, the earlier discussion demonstrated how more new childminders are more highly qualified, suggesting that the negative views of Level 4+ childminders is not necessarily a barrier to childminding. Instead, it could be argued that qualifications help contribute to shaping people’s expectations as to how the professional role is perceived.

*Figure 17 Extent with Which Childminding is Seen as a Profession by Qualification Level*

On a Scale of 0%-100%...	Level 1&2	Level 3 (encompassing both full and part)	Level 4 +
To what extent do you think the general public understand the realities of working as a childminder?	28.15	28.68	22.66
To what extent do you think parents/carers understand the realities of working as a childminder?	43.62	44.98	43.03
To what extent do you think the childcare and early years community understand the realities of working as a childminder?	44.76	46.65	44.57

The lack of variation in the responses by qualification level in relation to understandings of the realities of childminding suggest that it is the professional status of childminding that is seen as more debated than that of the work of a childminder.

The debated nature of childminding as a profession is also evident in the division in responses as to whether childminders should change their name. Considering all respondents, 47.99% thought that there was a need to change the name ‘childminder’, indicating a broad divide in views.

As seen in the literature review, professionalism has become a much debated concept within CC&EY communities (Campbell-Barr, 2019), with contentious debates relating to pay, status and general recognition of the work of the CC&EY sector. These are important debates that should be recognised within the context of the data being report. The data demonstrates that those who are involved in childminding see it as a high quality service, but that it is a profession that is not widely understood. While there have been historic policy initiatives to support professionalising the sector (Georgeson and Payler, 2014), it is evident that these have not resulted in a wider recognition of the professional role of childminders.

In the open comments, examples around professionalism were in relation to the value that was placed on the work that childminders undertook, particularly in relation to forms of documentation that may be shared with other parts of the CC&EY community. For example, while some respondents highlighted the importance of their observations of child development, other respondents felt that these were ignored among the CC&EY workforce:

“we need to be accepted and respected. I find it hard to work in partnerships with schools and other professionals and I provide information to them but don't get the same respect”

and



“I've found that not many other professionals value our knowledge and expertise”.

Similarly, many respondents claimed that nursery settings and other professionals did not value or understand the work of childminders. Respondents suggested that there was a lack of communication between the workforce, including ignoring the documentation childminders provided which often flagged developmental checks and outlined a child's learning journey:

“despite it being an Ofsted requirement to work and share practice with other early years professionals very little information comes my way from other settings.”

Many respondents reported health visitors recommending nurseries for children's learning and development, and not reading the two year old checks and observations provided.

“Many professionals do not work so well with childminders. The 2 yo [year olds] check is barely looked at by HV [health visitor]. Teachers think it is easier to speak to preschools rather than us. Partnership is often one way and with a lot of work on our side.”

Additionally, respondents suggested that they had to approach other professionals, and work hard at establishing links, which can be frustrating and one sided. A few comments further highlighted a divide among the workforce by describing childminding as isolating, with some respondents suggesting, “I rarely worked with other professionals” and “it can be quite isolating for younger members especially in rural areas.” Consideration of a career progression framework in the CC&EY sector is therefore about much more than individual professionalism, but also a need for wider recognition of the professional work of the different roles within CC&EY.

Many respondents suggested childminders are not seen as equal to Nurseries or school based settings, even though they deliver similar educational experiences.

“Parents usually see it as professional but seem to choose nurseries before childminders e.g. for funding. People often ask when my children will go on to nursery even though I deliver funding! This makes me sad that they don't view me as on the same level as nursery.”

Many respondents had experienced not getting the recognition for the training they had undertaken and the professional service they deliver.

Several respondents highlighted that whilst some childminders provided a high quality service; others did not, which could affect childminders' reputation. Respondents also highlighted that they provided children with quality teaching and learning, using the Early Years curriculum or framework, which other professionals and parents were not aware of, or recognised. One respondent stated, “Although I consider myself professional and highly committed I don't think some parents and other practitioners in the childcare sector share this opinion.” Some respondents highlighted the misconception of the title childminder, with a large number of responses highlighting their perception as ‘babysitters’. “Some parents treat childminders as ‘baby sitters’ and don't understand the quality training we undertake usually in our own time and paid for by ourselves”. Recognition of the work of childminding is clearly not just about getting recognition within the CC&EY community, but also amongst parents.

The open responses add further weight to the view that childminding is often identified as low status, by both parents and other members of the CC&EY sector. Further, there is the suggestion that childminders feel unable to shift the perceptions of the other CC&EY settings that they are working with. O'Connell (2011) asks the question of how you can be professionalised, if you have no agency over the conditions and this is reflected in the case studies.

## CASE STUDY (1):

### VIEWS OF THE PROFESSION: PRIDE AND THE NEED FOR RECOGNITION

Three examples from interviews and focus groups in one case study area bring to the surface some of the tensions and synergies between the education and care aspects of the professional role of a childminder. These discussions were underpinned by an assumption (sometimes voiced explicitly) that learning in home-based care is different from setting-based care, because it happens in the course of domestic routines and planned visits, as well as during the sort of pre-arranged activities and continuous provision from resources and routines that might be found in any CC&EY setting.

#### CASE STUDY (1a):

*Lara had become a childminder after seeing the benefits for her youngest child in comparison with the experiences of her older children who had attended nursery when she was working full-time; she decided that it looked 'fun' and started childminding herself. She undertook basic training, then a Level 3 qualification followed, sometime later, by a graduate level course at university. Having her own children meant she was confident about the practicalities of caring for young children; the Level 3 qualification consolidated her instincts to be able to do this in a professional context. She hoped that taking a further graduate-level qualification would help her move on to the next level but still feels that she does not 'talk the talk' in the same way that colleagues who have studied early years in a three-year degree course do. Instead, the professional course confirmed to her that she's 'OK at what I'm doing – like a yearlong Ofsted of myself', consolidating her practice but not changing it substantially. At a subsequent Ofsted inspection, however, she was disappointed to be rated only as 'good'; she wondered whether not being able to 'talk the talk' and the absence of a written self-evaluation plan had made it more difficult for her to evidence the thinking behind details of her practice. Her qualifications reassured her judgment in her own practice but she still found it difficult to convey her own belief in the quality of her provision to someone outside that practice. She fears that the proposed changes to the inspection framework will further jeopardise her chances of an outstanding judgement, because it will rely even more on being able to 'talk the talk'.*

*She enjoys the autonomy of being self-employed but would prefer a steady income; working in schools offered an attractive prospect but, if she could design her perfect job, she would be working directly for the council with an annual salary and purely caring for two-year-old children: they would "come to me for a year, get you on your feet, send you out to somewhere else, off you go. That would be my dream. I love that age". This is where she feels her talents lie; she recalls how she 'made a difference' for a particular two-year-old from a disadvantaged background:*

*"Just being here, sitting at a table to eat a meal was a shocker for this child. Using cutlery was a new concept. Sitting down and having a story read to this child. I don't think that had happened very much before. Maybe once or twice but not much more than that. The concept of not bouncing on the sofa because that's not how we behave, that was new. The idea of just what I would consider basic manners and behaviour was alien to this child. Now I know, regardless of what happens, whatever they go on to do, they now have something that they can fall back on and go, "Hang on a minute. I vaguely remember that you were supposed to say hello and good morning to people." Vaguely maybe. But actually I know they will be because I taught them really well. I just know what he was when he started and I know how he was when he went. And that was huge. Probably my proudest one."*

### **CASE STUDY (1b):**

*Childminding is just one of three jobs that Ellie currently holds; she works part time in professional support at the local university, undertakes transcription and offers after-school care. She came into childminding for financial reasons when she returned to work after maternity leave. There was no afterschool / breakfast provision at her local primary so parents had to find childminders for wrap around care. This was going to prove expensive for three children so out of expediency on return to work she started childminding herself and adjusted her working hours accordingly. The number of children that she cares for has built gradually year on year from one to two children once or twice a week for 2.5 hours. She is now busier now than ever, reflecting the view across the authority that supply is matching demand, and she now has twenty children on roll, with an average of six per day, staying within statutory ratios. Her initial registration included training at NVQ Level 2 with a particular focus on safeguarding because of history of the local context; introductory talks were delivered by an independent organisation and training by the local childminding association, with plenty of support from Local Authority personnel in the beginning. Although she also had to supply references and a doctor's letter, as well as Ofsted initial registration inspection documents, she did not find the process then (back in 2011) too arduous. She has attended some training since but also found that aspects of her day job supporting education academics has prompted her to develop the education side of her after-school care. She is now proud of the support she is providing for children across the curriculum and works closely with school to ensure its relevance. She values support from Local Authority staff that she has built up a relationship with over the years, particularly when she is unsure about how to support a particular child.*

### **CASE STUDY (1c):**

*Margaret is an experienced childminder who attended the city focus group. She has had a previous career in the health service and spoke with pride about the quality of service she provides. In particular, she highlighted that how she tries to offer a 'home from home' with home-cooked food. Parents have told her how much they value the 'homeliness' of her provision, but she reports that this kind of quality is not recognised by the inspection processes. She was judged 'good' in her last inspection but was disappointed as she feels her service met parents' and children's needs and was of similar quality to her colleagues'; the reasons for not getting 'outstanding' were not compelling, in her view, and were related to aspects of the EYFS, not to the home-from-homeness of her provision that was so valued by parents. Her colleagues (as well as other interviewees) also reported that Ofsted's criticism often seemed to be related to concerns that childminders' provision did not match practice in group-based care (items in the home were not labelled; numerals were not introduced into talk with babies although positional terms were frequently being used; the difference between fruit and vegetables was not explained when introducing this vocabulary to two-year-olds) – and that these criticisms did not seem appropriate given the young age of the children in their care. The counter arguments by the childminders about how they had addressed these aspects of the EYFS while retaining the particular homelike atmosphere were not accepted, which contributes to a widespread perception among childminders that their kind of professionalism is not well understood by others.*

Despite relevant qualifications, training and an impressive range of activities regularly undertaken with children (including French, phonics and trips to different locations), their lack of confidence in being able to 'sell themselves' to Ofsted suggests that childminders' relative isolation for much of their working day offers them fewer opportunities than those in group-based care to talk through how the service they offer addresses all areas of the EYFS. This extends to a lack of understanding from other

professionals about the complexity and demands of the role, and the need for other professionals to advocate for childminding:

*“I think also professional courtesy from other professionals to just make sure that we’re not treated like babysitters. If we didn’t have [Local Authority Team], the word doesn’t get out there that we are another set of professionals and we go unnoticed because everyone will consider nurseries but they won’t necessarily consider childminders. You need a voice that’s bigger than one person.”*

Other childminders identified the need for a voice exclusively for childminders

*It’s been the same for quite a few years now. No one is actually out there promoting childminders. I’ve been a member of PACEY more than some of you people have been born but PACEY still, in my eyes, doesn’t put you out there. You don’t have an advert on the telly, “Come on.”*

*PACEY used to be just for childminders. It’s not now.*

*It’s changed brands and now it’s all childcare, isn’t it?*

*But even when it was just childminders, it never advertised nationally in the papers or on TV or anything saying...*

*It was a known brand though. People did know about it. That was childminding promoted wasn’t it? We even had a magazine that used to come out that was NCMA based. When it changed to PACEY, yes, the columns were smaller around childminders but yes, it’s just trying to get us back to know that we’re still the professional. We still have to offer that same service as nurseries. We all work to the same regs. I think it’s unregarded by doctors, health visitors. They’re my main people to educate but we are a professional service.*

This conversation occurred in the context of a discussion about whether ‘childminding’ was the most informative term to describe the work they do:

*I think childminders need their names changing because I think we’re all childcare professionals. I think until that happens... I honestly feel we’re all doing the same job. I was a nursery professional for 38 years...[.]. I fully believe that everybody, whether you’re in nursery or you’re private or voluntary, we are all doing the same job. We should all be childcare professionals.*

*It’s been debated for years now.*

*I think the childminder still has a stigma of someone who is staying at home and puts a little bit of TV on. They don’t see everything you’re doing and the approach you have.*

The frustration about how the role of childminding is viewed outside of the profession – and particularly outside the early years sector – was a constant theme throughout the interviews and discussions.

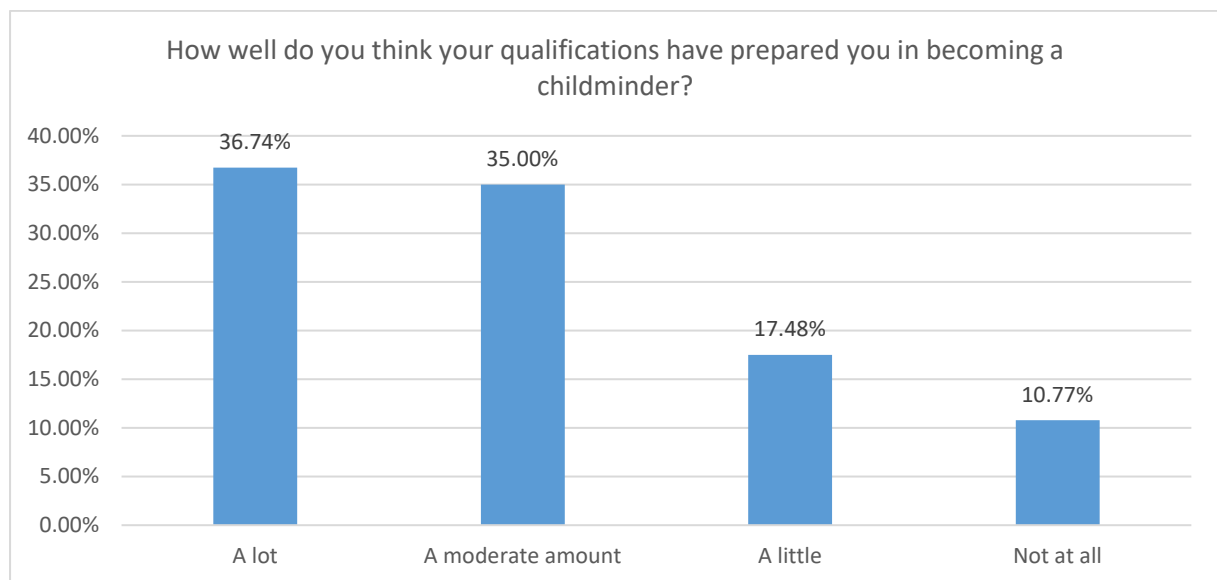
## Qualifications and Career Progression

While it is not possible to conflate qualifications and professionalism, there is a recognised relationship between the two that makes it pertinent to consider the place of initial qualifications and continued professional development (CPD) in supporting individuals in their professional role. Focussing on only

the childminders who responded to the survey, the following analysis considers how well qualifications prepare a person for being a childminder and opportunities for professional development.

When asked how well do you think your qualifications have prepared you in becoming a childminder? most respondents were favourable about their qualifications. This is largely in keeping with other research that has demonstrated that qualifications prepare people for working with children from birth to five years of age (Georgeson et al., 2014).

Figure 18 Qualifications and Preparedness

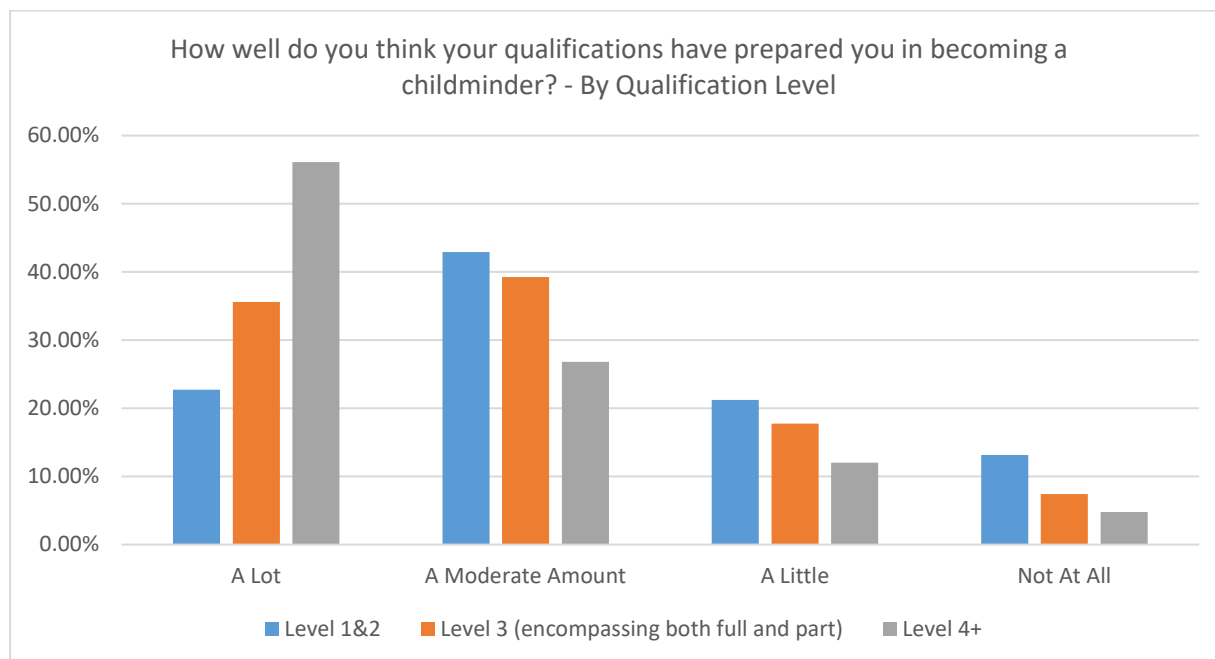


The responses on how well qualifications prepared people were analysed in relation to the qualification level sub groups. The findings indicate that those with higher qualifications are more likely to be favourable about the extent with which their qualifications have prepared them for working in childminding. The findings therefore indicate a need for a renewed focus on setting minimum qualification levels for childminders that are in line with the rest of the sector (Nutbrown, 2012), and an ambition for degree level qualifications in childminding.

While the survey did not ask for the specific details of the qualifications, the findings are interesting in light of ongoing analysis of degree qualifications for those going on to work in the CC&EY sector<sup>3</sup>, which offers evidence that childminding is not specifically considered within degree courses. Further, many higher level qualifications are focused on working in group-based CC&EY environments, suggesting that they do not consider the specifics of working in childminding. However, the findings indicate that a higher level qualification, whilst potentially generically focused on CC&EY, is more likely to prepare someone for becoming a childminder. Further, given that [requirements to work in childminding](#) currently only require an introductory course, it is interesting to note that those with Level 1 and 2 qualifications are least favourable about the extent with which their qualifications prepared them to become a childminder.

<sup>3</sup> A Systematic Review of Early Years Degrees and Employment Pathways – undertaken by Verity Campbell-Barr and Sara Bonetti and funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

Figure 19 Qualifications and Preparedness by Qualification Level



Despite the evidence that many childminders have obtained higher qualifications than current regulations require, levels of satisfaction with professional development opportunities are not very positive, with only 9.45% being very satisfied, 40.78% satisfied, 39.15% not so satisfied and 10.62% not at all satisfied.

Earlier data indicated that respondents had mixed views about the opportunities for career progression in childminding, with 27.9% of the total sample disagreeing that there were opportunities for CPD. Open responses indicated that the opportunities for CPD could be variable by local authority area.

“Thankfully, being a member of PACEY I have access to courses related to childminding. My Local Authority provide courses and training, but 99% of these sessions are inaccessible due to being held during childminding working hours.”

There is a suggestion that those working in childminding may be seeking to address the perceived professional status of childminding through obtaining higher qualifications than required. While some childminders may have obtained higher qualifications as a result of having worked in other parts of the CC&EY sector, broadly childminders should be commended for going above and beyond minimum expectations. This commendation is particularly encouraging at a time when the wider CC&EY workforce is struggling with support for training and CPD (Bonetti, 2018).

It is also worth highlighting that the open responses gave some indications of the complicated structures that existed around career progression within the wider CC&EY sector, whereby there are no clear and common pathways. Documents such as the Early Years Career Progression Map<sup>4</sup> have indicated a relatively linear pathway in CC&EY whereby higher qualifications signify a step along an

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cache.org.uk/for-learners/choosing-early-years-as-a-career>

CC&EY career pathway, within which childminding is a starter occupation. However, within the data there was little evidence to support there being such a clear and linear pathway. 62.12% of the childminders who responded to the survey indicated that they had worked in other CC&EY settings, often private day nurseries. Examples among the respondents illustrated instances where those who had been teachers had subsequently become childminders and that people moved around the CC&EY sectors in varying ways. Not only does this indicate that there are different career trajectories in the CC&EY sector, but it also raises questions as to whether a single qualification can prepare for all career journeys.

In the open comments, some respondents suggested there was no clear career progression or career route for childminders. Respondents highlighted that they held teaching or similar degrees, but that this did not transfer to childminding.

“I have been a manager of a 100 place nursery with a degree in early years but would need to do a childminding course to be able to child mind.”

Similarly, another comment suggested that a childminder wished to progress to teaching but did not find that their years of experience was valued:

“I'd like a chance to progress to teaching but we get no credit for years childminding even with a degree.”

The findings therefore signal a need to consider in detail the career progression for childminders, how this relates to the wider CC&EY sector and whether childminding is explicitly considered in CC&EY qualifications.

## CASE STUDY (2)

### CAREER PROGRESS

*Lucy was a registered childminder for fifteen years. She had trained as a nursery nurse then, when a friend went back into teaching, she offered to look after her little girl – but wanted to do it officially. She loved children – she has five children of her own - and this fitted in with her own family and patterns of life at that time. Then sixteen years ago she started to work in the Support Childminder Scheme on a voluntary basis. With the support of a development officer who acted as mentor, she studied first for an adult teacher certificate and taught on the Introduction to Childminding Practice with a local college. This led to a DfE-funded post with the Local Authority as their childminding network coordinator. This was part of an old NCMA network which she established and maintained until PACEY withdrew from these networks*

*In this role she worked with the Childminding Development Officers to support the recruitment and training of childminders. As the team grew, she took on the leadership role for childminders, before a restructuring led to her becoming leader of a generic team with one locality around children centre areas. Further restructuring has followed and she is now an early years and childcare team leader for the whole of the Local Authority, overseeing a team of generic childcare development officers as well as SENCO teachers.*

*She commented that perhaps she ‘did everything the wrong way round’ by starting as a childminder, then getting a degree, a master’s and QTLS as well as reflecting on how all the things she has done in the past are helping her in her role now. Her close association with childminders throughout her career*

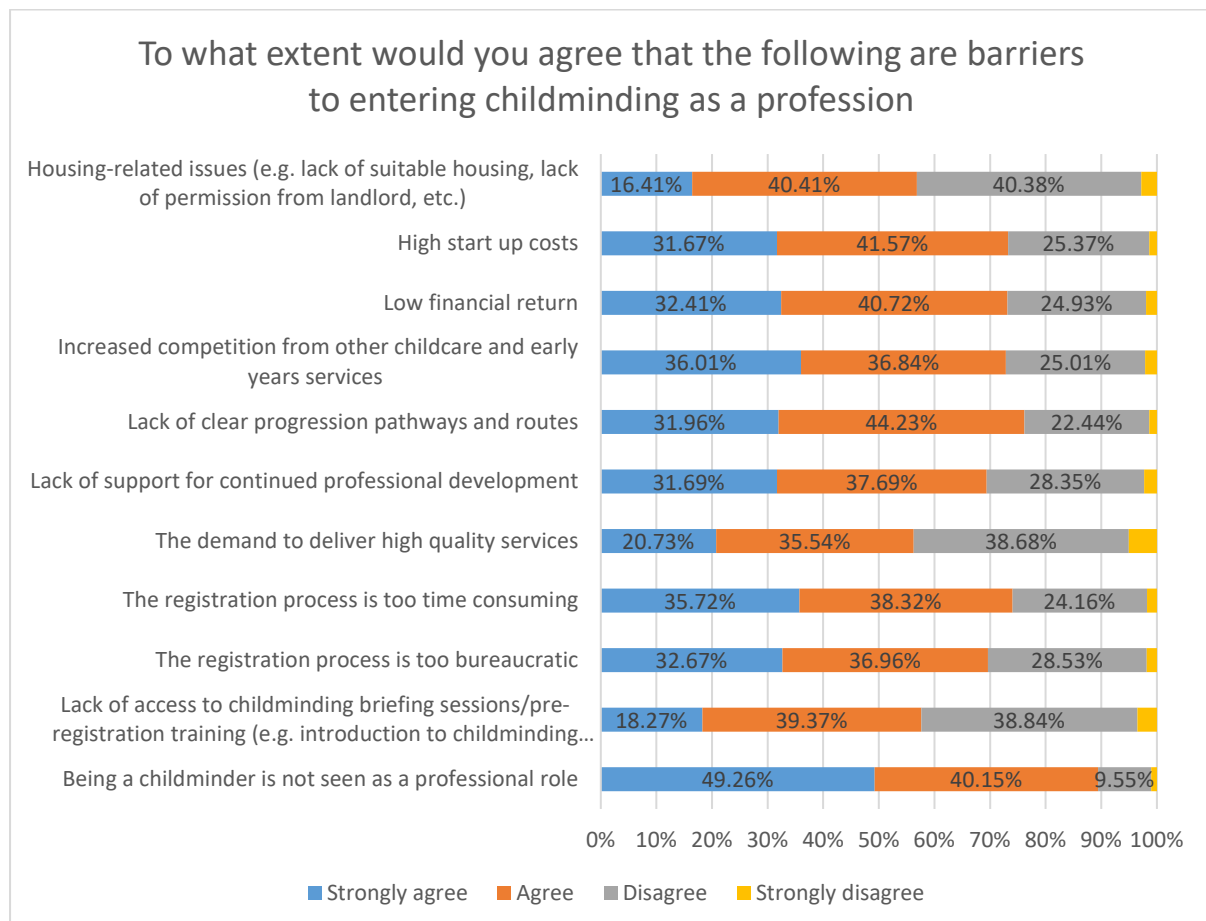
shapes the way she leads early years provision now. She is proud of the fact that all her team members are 'childminder friendly'.

*My funding coordinator is fiercely childminder friendly ... Over the years, I think I've converted them all because of my passion, my roots, so childminders are never missed out in our Local Authority... we always think childminder.*

### Registration and Paperwork

Given the decline in the number of people registering as childminders, respondents were asked what they thought were the barriers to people entering childminding. The lack of professional status for childminders was identified as a barrier to others entering childminding, further demonstrating the problematic nature of childminding being a recognised profession. While the professional status of childminders was identified as the main barrier to childminding, it was also evident that other core challenges were in relation to the registration process being both time consuming and bureaucratic.

Figure 20 Barriers to Childminding as a Profession



Participants were also asked what they thought would make childminding a more desirable profession. Within this question, participants were asked about a *reduction in paper work and regulatory burden*. While 77.25% thought a reduction in paper work would be beneficial and 64.57%



a reduction in regulator burden, *adequate payment for government funded places* was rated more highly at 81.39%. Further, *increased promotion of childminding as a career/professional choice* (73.29%) and *improved information nationally on what childminding entails* (70.45%) were rated more highly than the reduction in regulatory burden. Thus it would appear that while levels of paper work and bureaucracy are not desirable, it is the status of the profession that is regarded as needing addressing. Arguably, the status of the profession can be seen to be reflected in the rates of funding that those working in CC&EY receive. As one respondent commented:

“the pay per child reflects the views of society about childminders - the Government values it at around £4<sup>5</sup> an hour, so it doesn't feel valued or professional, despite our best efforts to do an excellent job.”

Therefore, the perceived inadequacy of funding can be related to the wider view that the work of childminders is not understood and that it is not a recognised profession.

### England and Wales

Given the differences in the regulatory systems and curriculums in England and Wales, responses for the respective countries were considered. Considering the extent with which the general sample thought that increases in the level of paper work and the demands of regulation and registration were contributing factors to people leaving childminding, it is possible to see that respondents in Wales more ‘strongly agreed’ that the increase in paper work was an issue (75.56% in Wales compared to 65.15% in England), but that there was little difference in the views on the demands of regulation and registration.

Figure 21 Reason for Leaving Childminding: Increase in the level of paperwork

Row Labels	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Number of Responses
England	65.15%	26.44%	8.11%	0.30%	2973
Wales	75.56%	21.59%	2.86%	0.00%	315
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>66.15%</b>	<b>25.97%</b>	<b>7.60%</b>	<b>0.27%</b>	

Figure 22 Reason for Leaving Childminding: The demands of regulation and registration

Row Labels	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Number of Responses
England	63.57%	26.67%	9.28%	0.47%	2973
Wales	65.40%	28.57%	5.71%	0.32%	315
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>63.75%</b>	<b>26.86%</b>	<b>8.94%</b>	<b>0.46%</b>	

In the open responses, respondents acknowledged the rigor of the registration process, and there were comments emphasising the necessity of this to “ensure the safeguarding of children and quality

<sup>5</sup> Rates of funding vary across England and Wales, so this amount is seen as indicative of overall funding rates. See the literature review for further details.

of provision". On the other hand, many respondents stated the registration process was long and costly, with two childminders reporting withdrawing after a year waiting for registration.

Some respondents emphasised differences in interpretations of the regulations, paperwork and education framework which resulted in negative inspections. Further comments emphasised stressful experiences from inspections by both CIW and Ofsted. A few respondents suggested they did not feel supported, or lacked the continuous support post registration that ensured they were working well, "we are constantly left worrying whether there will be enough children, money and if we are doing a good job".

In their comments about paperwork, respondents emphasised that the focus of childminding should be on children, stating:

"We want to work with the children not do and think about paperwork all the time. It means we work more than just when we are Childminding. Our evenings and weekends get taken up by paperwork,"

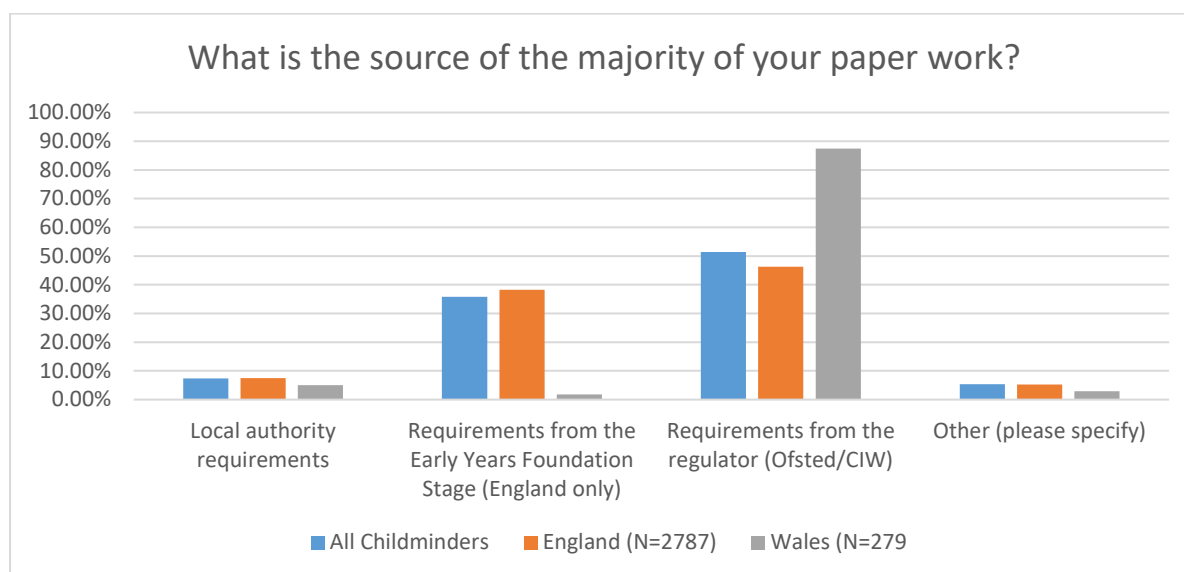
"Focus more on the children's learning and development and less [on] office work. The interaction between the child and childminder is the most important start in the building blocks of a child's learning."

"The workload and expectation have continued to increase with no funded support. I as a former childminder worked an unsustainable amount of hours to be flexible for parents but also keeping up with all requirements."

The open comments suggest that it is not solely the initial registration paperwork that is causing a tension for childminders, but the ongoing demands of paperwork within the context of both low rates of remuneration and long hours. Thus, while the need for some form of inspection was seen as necessary, there is a clear need to look at the burden it is placing on childminders in relation to time, finances and bureaucracy.

The questionnaire did explore the issue of bureaucracy in relation to paper work, asking what the source of the majority of paperwork was. Figure 23 demonstrates that for childminders in Wales, CIW is seen as the core source of paper work.

Figure 23 Sources of Paperwork



### CASE STUDY (3)

#### ADDRESSING PAPERWORK

The issue of paperwork has been acknowledged by Ofsted's Deputy Director for Early Childhood. A Myth Busting Guide has been launched that includes attempts to wane fears around the levels of paperwork that are required: <https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2017/04/21/myth-busting-guide-launched-for-early-years/>

In the guide CC&EY providers are advised that they should take an approach to paperwork that is appropriate for them, signposting to the Early Years Inspection Handbook that sets out the type of paperwork that is most likely to be requested.

Some childminders in the case study groups had used Ofsted's Facebook page and found that it was useful, but there was the potential to miss notifications if you did not monitor it closely:

*There is an Ofsted Facebook page which we are on but sometimes, again, it may be one notification. If you haven't clicked on or if you have been away on holiday for two weeks, they don't repeat that same information. Unless sometimes you're clicking on each link, you could miss something.*

*It's Early Years, isn't it? It's got to filter through the Early Years to what's relevant to childminders.*

Instead, many childminders relied on Sarah Neville's Facebook page:

*Well that's where internet groups can come in really useful, people like XXXX on the independent childminders page. She's very hot on things like that.*

*Yes. I mean God help us if we ever lost XXXX because I don't know how I would get the information I needed as quick as I needed it.*

Key Informants from Wales explained the move to online registration for childminders in February 2020. A recent review of National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Regulated Childcare had highlighted childminders' concerns about inconsistencies in the application of the NMS by CIW, and the need to complete extensive paperwork, which meant that they have less time to work with children. The review was informed in part by findings from a bilingual questionnaire on the NMS produced by Cwlwm<sup>6</sup> on behalf of the Welsh Government. Since the publication of the review CIW has been working in consultation with Cwlwm to develop online processes and the Self-Assessment of Service Statement, acknowledging the importance of making it clear that paperwork is purposeful and focused on outcomes for the child. This can be seen as a response to the aspiration voiced in the Review for 'greater collaborative working with CIW to help address inconsistencies, promote understanding and take forward the quality agenda'. The Review had concluded that '(t)ension exists between compliance with NMS being rated adequate and aspiration of many of the standards to provide quality provision; [The CIW Inspection] Framework includes an annex with links to statutory guidance and best practice guidance which could usefully be added to NMS'. Childcare providers need greater clarity about when they are providing a basic ('adequate') service and how they might demonstrate high quality provision. These considerations coincide with the release of the Welsh Government's plans to create a single, high-quality, child-centred approach to early childhood education and care, heralding reforms of early years that will take place over the next 10 years to ensure children get the best possible start in life. Engagement with the early years sector has shown the excitement and potential for collaboration surrounding these developments<sup>7</sup>.

While it is anticipated that a regulator contributes to levels of paperwork, there is evidence that it is limiting childminding from being perceived as a desirable career and profession. The below table further illustrates that paperwork is identified as more challenging in Wales than England, whereby a reduction in paper work is more favourably identified in Wales. However, *increased promotion of childminding as a career/professional choice, improved information nationally on what childminding entails* and *adequate payment for government funded places* are more highly identified in England as ways to make childminding more desirable as a career choice and profession.

Figure 24 What could help make childminding more desirable as a career choice and profession in England and Wales?

	Increased promotion of childminding as a career/professional choice	Improved information nationally on what childminding entails	Adequate payment for government funded places	Reduction in paper work	Reduction in regulatory burden	Number of Respondents
England	83.66%	74.01%	71.28%	77.03%	64.59%	2974
Wales	60.00%	66.03%	62.86%	82.54%	66.67%	315

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cwlwm.org.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> BERA Research Commission 2018/2020 – Competing Discourses of Early Childhood Education and Care. Welsh research event A Curriculum for the Early Years <https://www.bera.ac.uk/event/a-curriculum-for-early-years>

Figure 24 further reiterates that professionalism and registration and paperwork remain challenges for childminding to be a desirable profession. In the open comments it was evident that these were not separate issues, but ones that were closely entwined. The concerns around paper work were often presented within the context of the lack of recognition for the professional work of childminders.

“I also feel that childminding is not always recognised as an important part of the childcare workforce. An example of this is where I have been told by a CIW inspector that childminders would very rarely score an excellent in inspection. When I questioned this it appeared that it was easier for a nursery to score an excellent, not because of the quality of care but because childminders rarely have the ability to have the same resources as nurseries. I feel this makes it sound like the inspection criteria is unfair on childminders.”

One childminder even suggested that time management and paperwork needed to be factored into initial training to help better prepare future childminders. Furthermore, respondents proposed to have one area or online system to include all the necessary information on policies and procedures, help and support, developmental stages for children.

There is perhaps an inevitability to any profession complaining about bureaucracy and paperwork. However, the findings suggest that there is an ongoing story for childminders whereby the registration process is being identified as both time consuming and bureaucratic, in addition to having high start-up costs. These challenges are evidently in the minds of new childminders, but the story of bureaucracy and paperwork continues, whereby regulation and registration, along with the increase in paperwork are seen to contribute to people [leaving childminding](#) as is discussed later.

## CASE STUDY (4)

### REGISTRATION AND SUPPORT IN WALES

The local authority involved in the case study provide pre-registration support workshops for childminders to help complete the application:

*“about 84 pages long... it’s the same application that any childcare provider has to complete, so whether you are an after-school club, a day nursery, a playgroup, working in a community centre... so you’re meeting national minimum standards and all at the same level as all those other childcare provision”.*

Once registered, the local authority provide funding for a Quality Start Pack, which includes a year of PACEY membership, public liability insurance, business paperwork such as an account book, register, accident and incident form.

Following this, a Quality Care Review is completed yearly by childminders, which helps prepare for CIW inspections. In addition, Flying Start providers must have a Learning Development Record and Individual Child Plans including observations, assessments, record of progress; Attendance Policy, Transition Policy, Additional Support Policy and attend a minimum 12 hours training a year.

The case study illustrates how all CC&EY providers go through the same process, but there is a suggestion that the burden of registration is more acutely felt by childminders who are sole operators.

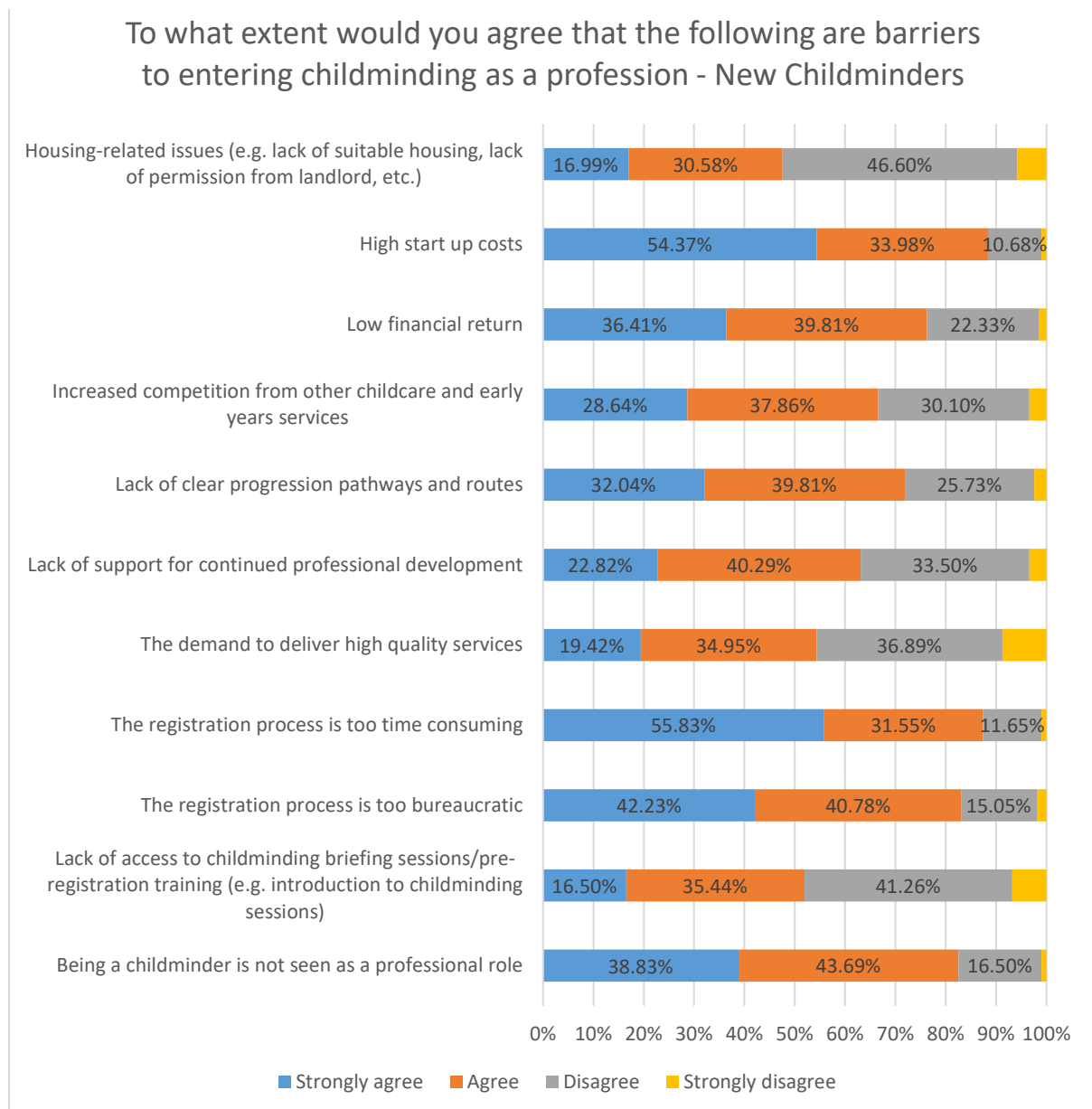
### New and experienced childminders

Looking at new childminders in relation to the questions on barriers to childminding offered the opportunity to consider in detail what may be preventing people from entering childminding from the perspective of those who have recently gone through the process. In comparing the responses of the new childminders to the overall sample there are some interesting findings:

- 45.23% of new childminders strongly agreed that the registration process was too bureaucratic, compared to 32.67% of all respondents.
- 55.83% of new childminders strongly agreed that the registration process was too time consuming, compared to 35.72% of all respondents.
- 54.37% of new childminders strongly agreed that high start-up costs were a barrier to childminding, compared to 31.67% of the whole sample.
- 16.50% of new child minders disagreed that being a childminder is not seen as a professional role, compared to 9.55% of all respondents.
- 33.50% of new childminders disagreed that there was a lack of support for continued professional development, compared with 28.35% of all respondents.
- 30.10% of new childminders disagreed that there was increased competition from other childcare and early years services, compared to 25.01% of the whole sample.
- 46.60% of new childminders disagreed that housing-related issues were a barrier to childminding, compared with 40.38% of the whole sample.

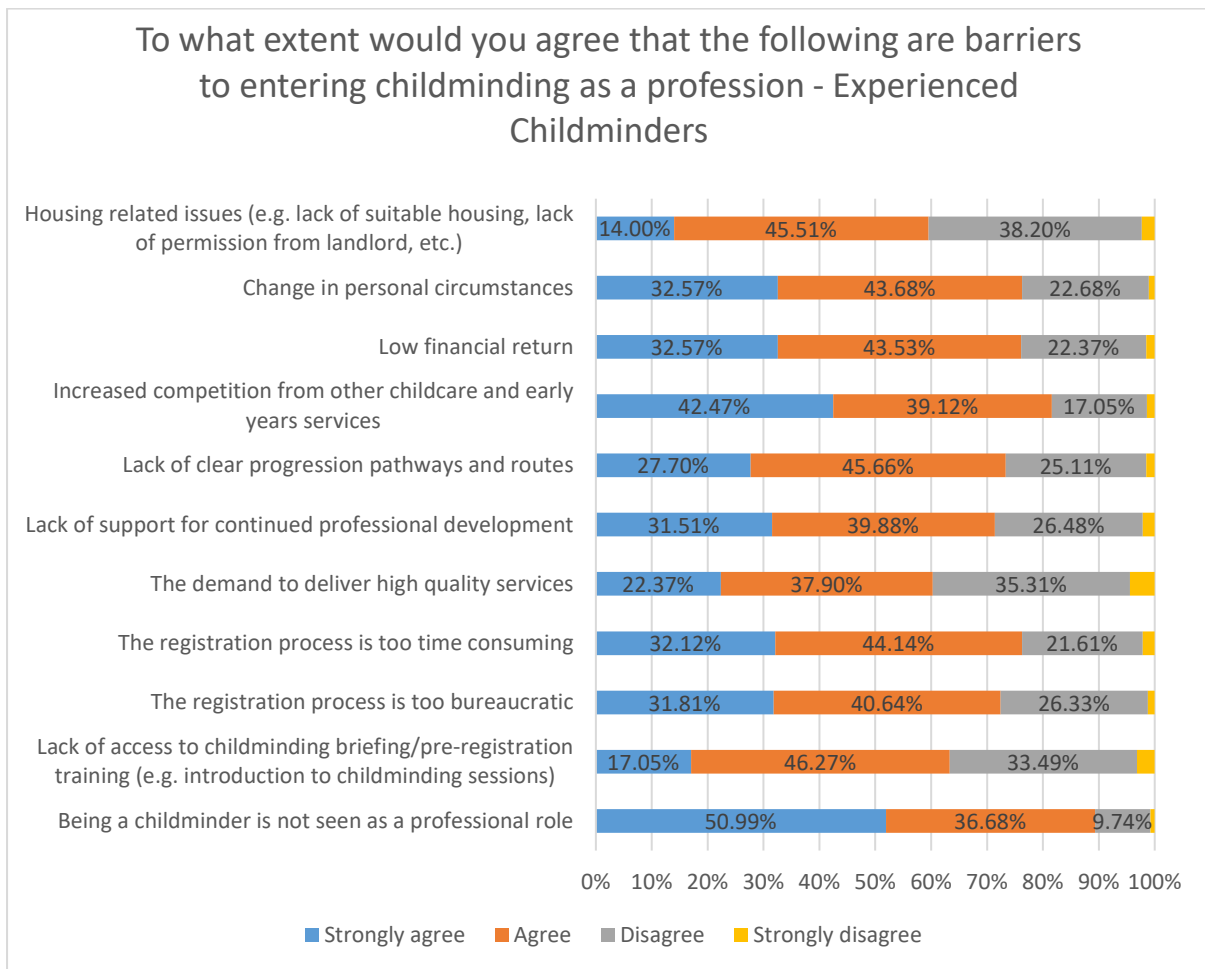
The findings from the new childminders emphasise that the time, bureaucracy and cost of becoming a childminder is problematic. Should such views reach other prospective childminders it could deter them from entering childminding. Further, childminding risks not looking like an appealing profession due to a lack of recognition for the profession or there being opportunities to support continued professional development. The barriers to childminding are therefore both relative (e.g. bureaucracy) and conceptual (e.g. how the profession is viewed).

Figure 25 New Childminder Views on Barriers to Childminding



Broadly, the responses of the experienced childminders are in line with the sample as a whole, but one difference is in relation to views on the levels of competition. 42.47% of experienced childminders strongly agreed that there was increased competition from other CC&EY services, with 36.01% of the whole sample strongly agreeing and 28.64% of new childminders. The suggestion is that time in childminding contributes to a more pessimistic view as to the extent that other parts of the CC&EY sector are a source of competition. However, interestingly, these messages do not appear to be being transferred between experienced and new childminders. While new childminders are focused on the challenges of bureaucracy as barriers to childminding, for experienced childminders it would appear that concerns surrounding sustainability continue to be an ongoing challenge, [something that is discussed later](#).

Figure 26 Experienced Childminders Views on Barriers to Childminding

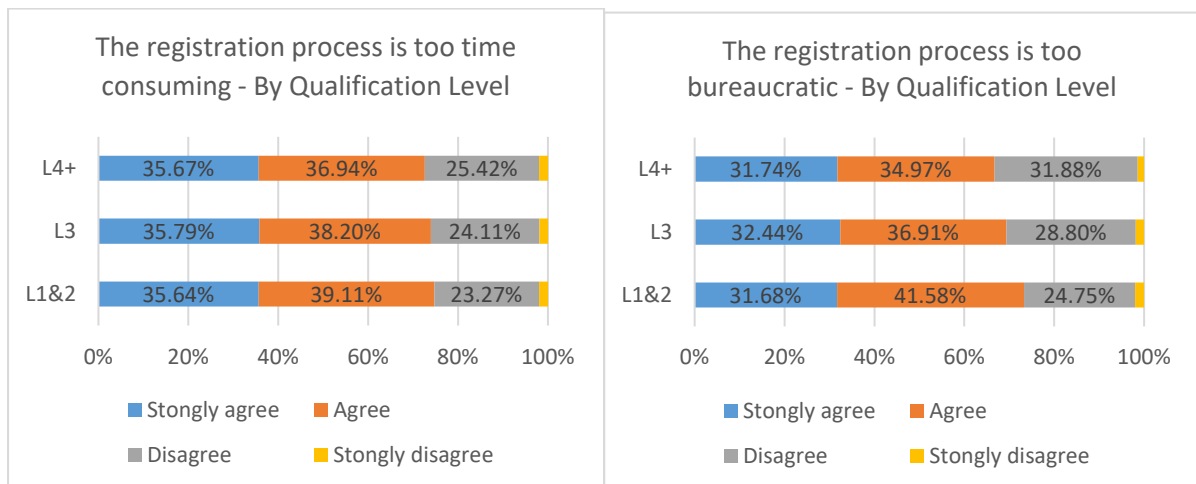


### Qualifications and Registration and Paper Work

In looking at the opinions of childminders about the registration process by qualification level it is evident that there is little difference in the responses across the different qualification subgroups and that each subgroup is largely in line with the overall sample.

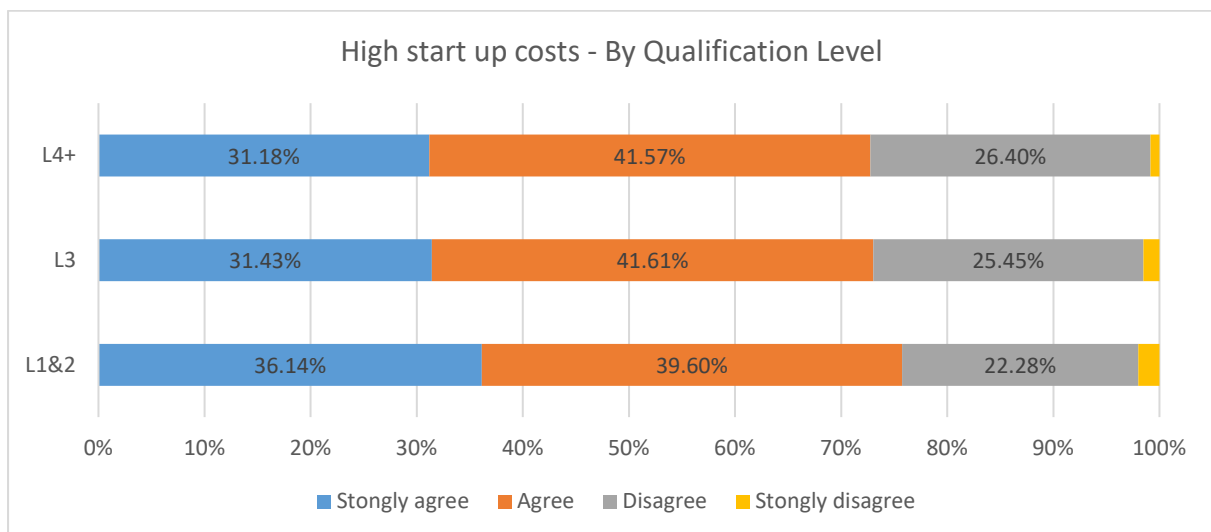


Figure 27 Views on Registration Process by Qualification Level



However, in looking at the start-up costs of going into childminding by qualification level it is evident that Level 1 and 2 childminders are more likely to 'strongly agree' that high start-up costs are an issue than those with qualifications of other levels or in comparison to the sample as a whole.

Figure 28 Views on Start Up Costs By Qualification Level

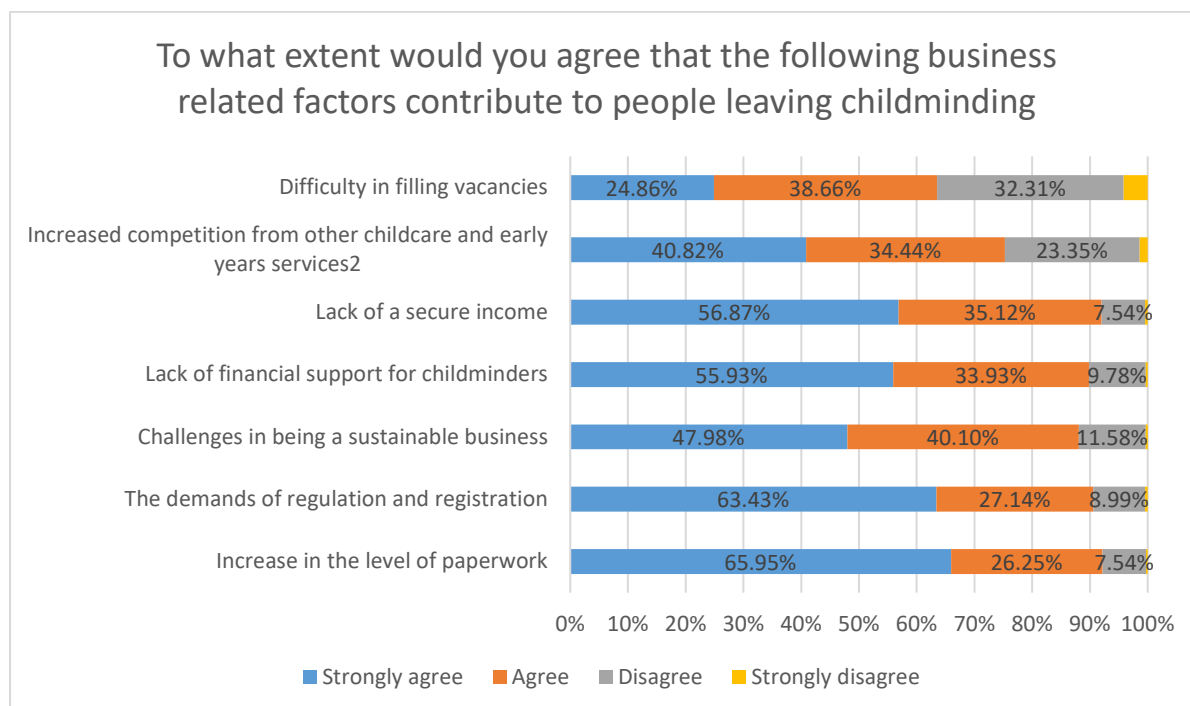


## Sustainability

The numbers of people leaving childminding clearly illustrates a challenge for the sustainability of childminding as a profession. In this section the factors that contribute to sustainability (not solely economic ones) are explored. All participants were asked to consider the reasons why they thought people left childminding in relation to personal circumstances and business related factors. Childminders were then asked a separate question about if they were considering leaving childminding. Therefore, having firstly considered the sample as a whole, there is an additional analysis focussing on those who stated they were planning on leaving the sector.

In considering the perspectives of the whole sample, it was evident that regulatory demands and paper work remained a core part of the childminding story. 65.95% of all respondents strongly agreed that the increase in the level of paperwork contributed to people leaving childminding, with 63.44% strongly agreeing that the demands of regulation and registration were an issue. Other core issues were related to more economic factors, such as financial support for childminders and the lack of a secure income.

Figure 29 Reasons for Leaving Childminding



### Childminders considering leaving

Childminders were asked do you plan to still be working as a childminder in 12 months time? The majority (66.5%) said they would still work in childminding, but 12.70% said no and 20.72% said don't know. Of those who said no or don't know and who also gave an indication of if they would stay in the childcare and early years sector (N=1335), 23.22% said they would stay in the sector, the remainder saying they would leave or did not know.

Do you plan to still be working as a childminder in 12 months time?	
Yes	66.50%
No	12.79%
Don't know	20.71%

If you are planning to leave childminding, do you intend to stay working in the childcare and early years sector?	
Yes	23.22%
No	37.30%
Don't know	39.48%

Focussing on those who said they did not plan to still be working in childminding in 12 months time (N=388), additional analysis was undertaken to consider what may be the contributing factors. Initial analysis focused on demographic data before analysing the questions pertaining to contributing factors to people leaving childminding.

The below tables summarise the years of experience and qualifications of those considering leaving childminding. Figure 30 illustrates that those planning on leaving childminding in the next 12 months are less experienced (more recently registered) than the sample as a whole, while Figure 31 also illustrates that those leaving are also more highly qualified than the sample as a whole. As is discussed below, while it could be assumed that the higher qualifications may offer other job opportunities, only 30% of those planning on leaving childminding strongly agree that the offer of other employment was a reason for people leaving childminding. These findings continue the story of complex career trajectories within the wider CC&EY sector, whereby childminding represents a part of a wider career trajectory.

*Figure 30 Those Leaving Childminding - Years Experience*

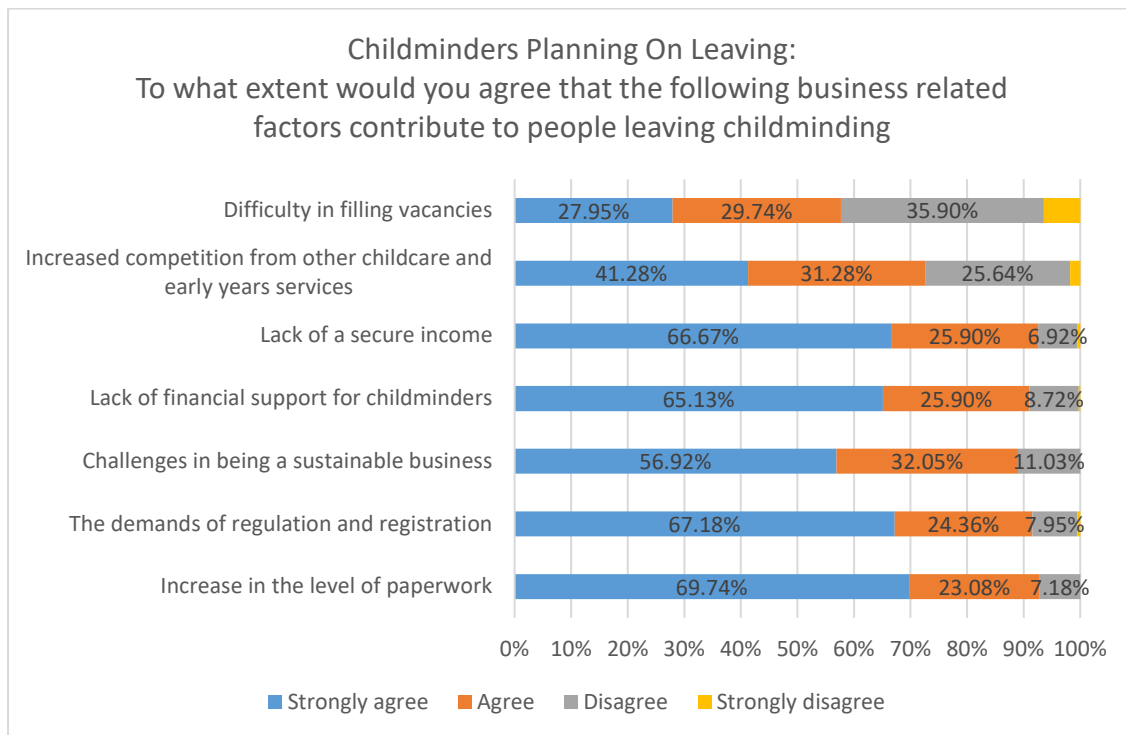
Years Experience		Higher or Lower than Whole Sample
Up to a year	3.61%	↑
2-5 years	20.88%	↑
6-10 years	28.09%	↑
11-15 years	19.07%	↑
16-20 years	10.82%	↓
20+ years	17.53%	↓

*Figure 31 Those Leaving Childminding - Qualifications*

Qualifications		Higher or Lower than Whole Sample
L1 & 2	5.41%	↓
L3	51.55%	↓
L4+	30.15%	↑
Don't Know/Don't have one	12.89%	→

The following graph illustrates that the issue of paperwork is a clear contributing factor for people planning on leaving childminding, reiterating how paperwork is a feature of childminding at the point of start up and leaving. However, it is also evident that other factors also interplay.

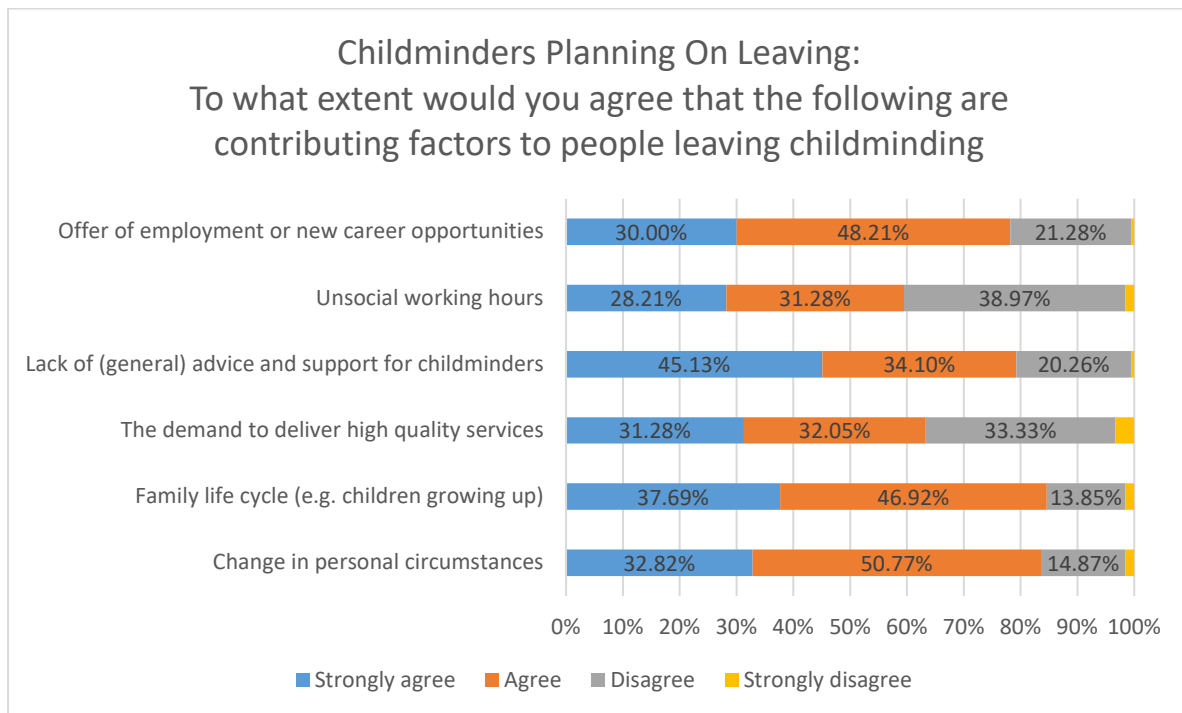
Figure 32 Childminders Planning on Leaving Business Factors for Leaving



In comparing the responses of those planning on leaving against the sample as a whole the following features emerge:

- 56.92% of those planning on leaving childminding strongly agreed that challenges in being a sustainable business contributed to people leaving childminding compared with 47.98% of the whole sample
- 65.13% of those planning on leaving childminding strongly agreed that the lack of financial support for childminders contributed to people leaving childminding, compared with 55.93% of the whole sample
- 66.67% of those planning on leaving childminding strongly agreed that the lack of a secure income contributed to people leaving childminding as a profession, compared with 56.87% of the whole sample

Figure 33 Childminders Planning on Leaving Personal Factors for Leaving

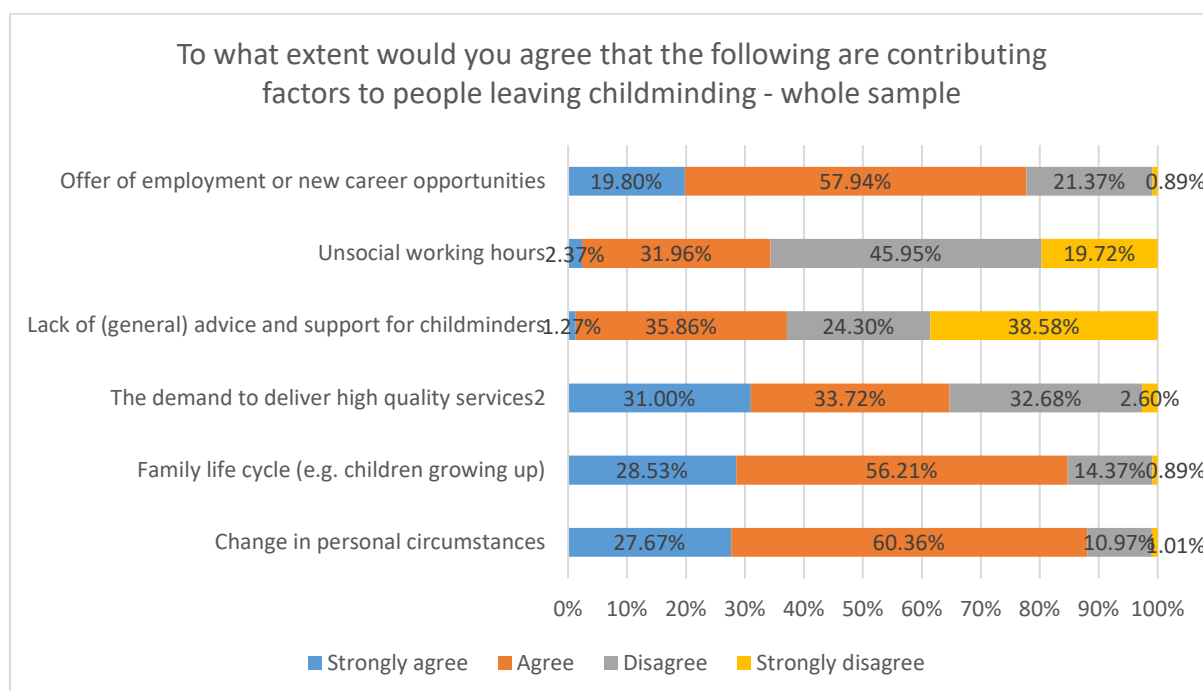


Comparing the personal reasons for those planning on leaving childminding against the sample as a whole the following notable differences occur:

- 32.82% of those planning on leaving childminding strongly agreed a change in family circumstances contributed to people leaving childminding, compared with 26.67% of the whole sample
- 37.69% of those planning on leaving childminding strongly agreed family life cycle contributed to people leaving childminding, compared with 28.53% of the whole sample
- 45.13% of those planning on leaving childminding strongly agreed a lack of advice and support for childminders contributed to people leaving childminding, compared with 1.27% of the whole sample
- 28.21% of those planning on leaving childminding strongly agreed that unsocial working hours contributed to people leaving childminding compared with 2.37% of the whole sample
- 30% of those planning on leaving childminding strongly agreed that an offer of employment contributed to people leaving childminding compared with 19.08% of the whole sample

Overall, the sample as a whole seemed to be less likely to strongly agree with the statements as to the personal reasons for leaving childminding, suggesting that there is a degree of uncertainty as to why people chose to leave the profession. While factors such as family dynamics and personal circumstances would be difficult to address, the area of [support and advice](#) for childminders is something that could be considered as an area for intervention. Those planning on leaving childminding clearly feel that advice and support is lacking and this should be addressed.

Figure 34 Reasons for Leaving Childminding



### General Comments

Given the decision to leave childminding, it is perhaps unsurprising that this particular subgroup identify more areas as being problematic than the sample as whole. However, the implications are that the general childminding community do not fully understand the pressures that contribute to people opting to leave the profession.

The data illustrates that the sustainability of childminding is not solely in relation to economic factors, although these do still clearly play an important part as is evident in the open comments. Many respondents suggested the poor income and introduction of 30 hours have led to childminders leaving, “childminders are leaving the profession to go into jobs with more financial stability”. Respondents described juggling low income with long hours, unpaid work in the form of preparing the home, completing paperwork, taking time off to keep updated with training, and then paying for training. Further, respondents continued to raise the issue of competition within their area due to nurseries and schools offering lower rates and cheaper alternatives to childminding such as before and after school clubs.

However, the sense of value in childminding was not solely economic. Some respondents highlighted being undervalued, underappreciated or not respected by parents and other professionals in the workforce, whereby the sustainability was identified as being entwined with its professional status. A few comments suggested childminders stopped due to a lack of career progression, or because they are interested in finding a profession with more status, such as teaching. One respondent stated, “I am working on leaving the profession partly because it no longer fits in with my own family but also because I feel my experience/qualifications are wasted. I am now tutoring in Early Years alongside childminding.” Another stated “Childminding has a bad image of staying at home and just babysitting, not as a professional teacher status.”

Respondents also described different circumstances within family life that contributed to a decision to leave childminding. A few responses suggested childminders' own children grew older and needed their family home, whilst other childminders expressed their desire to change to a job outside of the home, to separate the home-work balance. Other respondents highlighted the benefits of changing career, for example, working in a school for less hours and similar or better wages.

Broadly the open comments highlighted many personal stories about the reasons for leaving childminding, but the quantitative data still clearly illustrates how the challenges of sustaining childminding are not solely economic, with paperwork and a lack of support also being identified as issues.

### Support Services

Having identified that a perceived lack of support for childminders was contributing to people leaving, this section considers the responses of those who did not identify as childminders to analyse what support structures are available.

There were 212 respondents who did not identify as childminders. Most of the respondents either had a role in the local authority or were other CC&EY practitioners.

Focussing on those respondents who could be regarded as offering support services (indicated with a \* in the table below), additional analysis was undertaken as to the support that was available to childminders.

*Figure 35 Role of Non-Childminder Respondents*

Role	Response Rate	Support Service
Academic/Researcher	0.94%	*
Charity/Voluntary Sector Early Years Organisation Staff Member	3.77%	*
Childcare and Early Years Consultant	3.30%	*
Childcare Early Years Trainer	3.77%	*
Local Authority Manager (e.g. hold an oversight of early years in the local authority)	10.85%	*
Local Authority Officer (e.g. provide hands on support to childminders)	14.62%	*
PACEY Development Officer	3.30%	*
Private Sector Childcare and Early Years Organisation Staff Member	2.36%	
Other childcare and early years practitioner	19.34%	
Other (please specify)	37.74%	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

There were only 86 respondents who could be identified as potentially offering a support service to childminders, so the analysis needs to be treated with caution due to the small sample size. Further, the analysis treats English and Welsh respondents collectively due to the small sample size, so the subtleties of the support structures available in the two countries cannot be considered. The below

indicates the level of support (by number of responses) offered to childminders (and other childcare and early years services).

Figure 36 Support for Childminders



The most common forms of support are face to face professional development, introduction to childminding courses and funding advice for all childcare and early years services. Those identifying that they offer support specific to the needs for childminders were lower in number than those offering support for all CC&EY services, but it is not possible to determine if this is proportional to the overall rates of childminders in specific areas. Online support was not highly used among support services, although it would need to be explored as to whether this was due to a lack of demand or lack of infrastructure (including appropriate skills) to set up online support mechanisms.

The variable response rates as to the kinds of support offered indicates that there is a lack of consistency across Local Authorities as to how support is provided for the CC&EY sector and childminders specifically.

While childminder specific support could help to address the unique role and concerns of childminders, it could also fuel the earlier concerns of a fragmented sector, within which the professional role of childminders was not recognised. Further, if online support were to be seen to be a viable option there is a question as to what this should look like.



## CASE STUDY (5)

### LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT

The case studies provided the opportunity to speak with local authority (LA) staff about the support that they offered and how it was structured. Broadly, support structures could be classified as:

- In house (provided directly by staff in the local authority)
- Out sourced (provided by external agencies)
- Community based (provided by local childminders)

Although no Childminder Agencies were directly involved in the case studies, focus group members shared the ways in which being a member of a Childminder Agency provided another form of support.

#### ***CASE STUDY (5a): Types of support***

Below provides a summary of what this support looks like in practical terms in one Local Authority in Wales:

- *LA commission PACEY Cymru to provide information sessions to attract new childminders. LA then funds courses (IHCC and PCP course) although now asks candidates to contribute to heavily subsidised course*
- *Provide pre-registration support workshops for childminders to help complete application*
- *Once registered, LAs Quality Start Pack includes PACEY membership for continued support*
- *LA also provides additional funding for PACEY Cymru to do telephone and email support for childminders*
- *LA can fund Advice Surgeries with PACEY associate for specific support such as paperwork*
- *Registered Childminders can then apply to LA for a start-up grant up to £300 for health and safety related items such as first aid kit, safety gate, storage etc.*
- *Flying Start Childminders are supported by Flying Start Advisory Teacher who visits monthly for assessments, targets and recommendations*

#### ***CASE STUDY (5b): Local authority support - managing diversity and capacity***

The number of funded childminders in the City Local Authority had risen noticeably following the introduction of two year old funding, and childminders were also essential in addressing the gap in provision for very young children within the authority. Childminders were seen as *'definitely integral to the sufficiency puzzle as it were for childcare in the city'* because *'they can offer more flexibility to those places, whereas the settings tend to be more rigid in their capacity to take people over a certain time of night and at four in the morning'*. Although recently there had been a small drop in numbers overall, the reasons given by childminders leaving were concern with changes related to their own families and to their own career progression. When designing support, Local Authority personnel keenly aware of difficulties of timing and location because childminders are

*So diverse - and we need the diversity - but it's quite difficult to choose a consistent approach that will suit the majority. So we try and, so it's really quite hard to engage. Not because they're not willing, because they are very willing when you get to talk to them. It's just a case of how, when they're working so hard at home with the children, the majority of the time, they don't get paid additional money to come out to things.*

*It makes it a long day for them; they come out for twilight training in the evening and they've been working since seven o'clock in the morning or sometimes earlier. If they have to pay for*

*training, that might be a whole day's wages for them. Even with our visits, we're putting children at the heart of what we do and we should be. Spending two hours at somebody's home, when they're trying to put the children first is really hard and is it right? There's a balance to be had, so they are a group of people we talk about quite a lot, whereas the other settings seem easier.*

As in other Local Authorities, the support team in the City case study drew on a range of experience from members who had been childminders themselves, and others who had worked in other kinds of early years provision. Support is divided between two teams, Welfare and Safeguarding and Learning and Development. A new childminder would first be offered initial information about what it involves being a childminder. Then, if they're happy to go ahead, they are passed on to the training team to sign up and pay for the pre-registration training. This currently happens about three times a year and is delivered in four sessions: the first session is an OFSTED briefing about how to register; the second session is about meeting the requirements of the EYFS; the third session is the child protection training; and the fourth session supports childminders with policy writing. Childminders talking in the focus group in the LA mentioned how they had met during these training sessions, and other compulsory training to update First Aid and safeguarding, and that from these informal networks had developed.

An experienced member on the Early Years Team traced the development of registration, training and support services offered by her Local Authority back to the 1990s, explaining how levels of support had fluctuated during that time in response to local and national policy and initiatives. This support had been outsourced to an independent provider before being brought in-house. Childminders interviewed in this Local Authority spontaneously mentioned the supportive nature of home visits from this team, and how this Local Authority team member herself had been an important source of advice and support at the beginning of their careers as childminders. The Local Authority team member still described herself as being 'at the end of the phone'. However, the capacity to make home visits had been seriously reduced, and childminders mentioned how much they missed this form of support. In the previous year, funded childminders were offered one visit per year but, because of capacity issues, the team were now holding twice-termly drop-in 'Stay and Play' sessions around the City for childminders who might want advice. Childminders who had not fared well in Ofsted inspections were however, offered more support, as were childminders involved in child protection cases.

The Local Authority personnel were aware of several informal networks that had grown up, but they did not get involved with these; instead they suggested to new childminders that they might use the Local Authority's online database - which was designed to help parents find childminders in their area - to find other childminders in their area. Local Authority team members were also aware that there were many experienced and supportive childminders who might be able offer advice to new entrants. While they felt it was not appropriate to recommend direct contact or endorse particular childminders, Local Authority team members would sometimes suggest a new childminder might attend a local group also attended by experienced childminders.

Relationships with both Local Authority personnel and other childminders were also established during registration and subsequent training in other case study contexts – and Local Authority staff here also described themselves as being 'on the end of the phone'. Relationship had, however, been built up over years of face to face contact where there were many more opportunities for support; as opportunities fall and costs for training rise, there are concerns that it could be more difficult in some situations for new entrants to build these kinds of relationships.

*I'd hate to be a newbie starting out now though. I'd hate it because there's nothing left, absolutely nothing. I'm lucky, I've got a number of years in this now, you know, two inspections, two years of reading Facebook forums.*

Respondents to the survey were also asked about whether they thought levels of support for childminders had changed in the last one or five years. Of those who responded (N=78), most felt that support had stayed the same over the last year, but views on changes in the level of support over the last five years were mixed.

Figure 37 Views in Changes to the Level of Support

	In the last year, would you say that support for childminders in your local area has:	In the last five years, would you say that support for childminders in your local area has:
Declined	23.08%	37.18%
Increased	27.79%	26.92%
Stayed the same	55.13%	35.90%

As identified earlier, 45.13% of childminders considering leaving strongly agree that a lack of (general) advice and support for childminders contributed to people leaving childminding. The decline in support services for childminders could therefore be identified as contributing to the wider challenges of sustaining the profession.

The open responses indicated that support for childminders was declining.

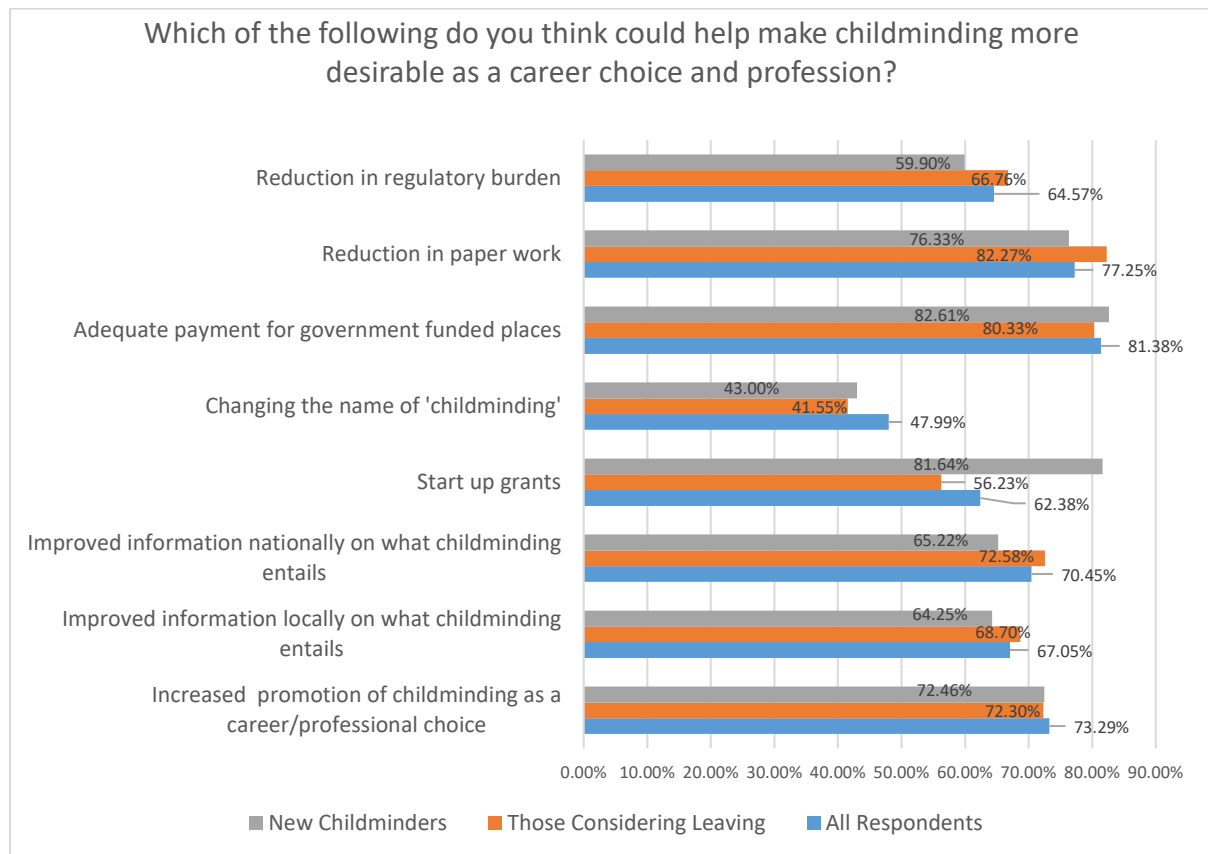
“Support for childminders is decreasing, 2 [of] our local childminding support groups have recently shut”.

“I really believe every local authority should have a team dedicated to supporting childminders. They need champions to facilitate networks, celebrate successes and promote ongoing CPD and opportunities.”

### Possible Solutions

All respondents were also asked to consider what they thought could help make childminding a more desirable profession. As can be seen in Figure 38, views on the possible solutions amongst the whole sample (blue) broadly reflect the continued challenges of childminding that have been discussed previously. However, the emphasis on the possible solutions foregrounds economics, with adequate payment for government funded places being the most favoured option, followed by addressing levels of paper work and improving recognition of childminding as a profession.

Figure 38 Making Childminding More Desirable as a Profession

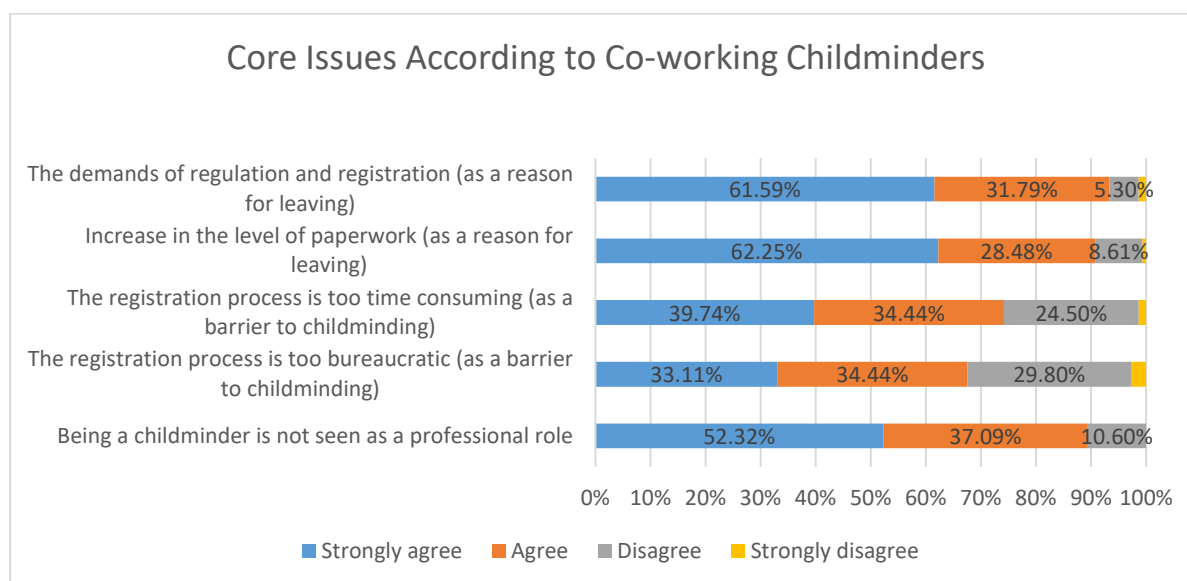


Among new childminders (grey) it is perhaps unsurprising that they cite start up grants as being a possible solution, while those considering leaving were more likely to identify a reduction in paperwork and regulatory burden as helping. While broadly there is little difference between the different subgroups of childminders displayed in Figure 38, the differences that are evident do reiterate earlier discussions.

### Innovation

In search of possible solutions to the challenges of professionalism, registration and paperwork and the sustainability of the childminding, one hypothesis was that co-working childminding could provide a form of resilience – borrowing from the proverbial of a problem shared is a problem halved. Given this hypothesis, the core challenges identified earlier in the report were analysed in relation to the subgroup of co-working childminders (i.e. they combine work hours with other childminders regularly to meet parental demand). There were 151 co-working childminders.

Figure 39 The Views of Co-Working Childminders



Looking at the previously identified core issues among co-working childminders it is possible to see little difference in their 'strongly agree' responses in comparison to the sample as a whole. Therefore, it suggests that co-working as a childminder does little to mitigate the core challenges facing childminding. In all instances the differences are below five percentage points. Therefore, there is no evidence in the quantitative data to suggest that co-working childminding helps to address some of the challenges faced by the sector.

In the open responses there were a few examples of where co-working or forming some kind of partnership was helping childminders to support each other. For example, one childminder stated:

"As part of a group, we have organised several in house training sessions. I attend the termly leaders and managers training which is always very useful".

Another said:

"I work alongside 3 other childminders so our children learn and play with a larger number of children"

And one said:

"Us local childminders stick together and do lots of outings together and I feel part of that community and the local community (library and so on) but not part of the early years work force."

All of these childminders have more than 20 years of experience, possibly indicating that time in childminding provides opportunities for forming connections with others in a way that is different to co-working or that these childminders had been able to form relationships during a time when there was more contact between childminders, as indicated in the case study.

One childminder recommended using a Toy Library "I use a toy library every week and I think this is an under-used resource which more childminders should use", and another said they worked closely with local schools and preschools, something that many others commented they thought would be really useful. These examples illustrate that the co-working nature of childminding does not have to

be about childminders working together, but can also include how childminders may work with part of the wider community, including other CC&EY settings. However, as will be discussed in the next section, not all childminders reported feeling a part of the CC&EY community, with evidence that new childminders are still in a process of forming their relationships with the wider community.

## CASE STUDY (6)

### FORMAL AND INFORMAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

#### *CASE STUDY (6a): Formal Support Networks*

In one Local Authority visited during the case study phase, childminders have the option of joining a formal Childminder Network. For an annual fee, members of the childminders network can receive help with completing an initial assessment of their practice, visits at least three times every year to assess and monitor practice, ongoing support, advice and challenge to practice during visits as well as via telephone, text and email. Network childminders are expected to commit to a minimum of 18 hours of Continued Professional Development each year and complete a reflective annual review of practice which includes feedback from children, parents/carers and professionals and set targets for the next 12 months. They also offer peer support to new childminders.

In return, they can attend weekly drop-in sessions where they can discuss matters with a co-ordinator and a network of peers. The Drop-ins also will provide children with an opportunity to socialise and benefit from the learning rich environment. Termly network meetings update members on regulatory changes, national and local initiatives. Network childminders get reduced rate insurance, can provide specialist services such as respite care as well as reduced entrance to local amenities. They can access promotional materials and enhanced promotion via a dedicated website and can promote themselves as a Network Childminder in any promotional marketing.

In this Local Authority Early Learning and Childcare Partnership Hubs have been established with DfE funding to bring parts of the sector together in a sustainable way meeting on school/setting premises. The Hubs are self-organising - 'They just sort of do it themselves' - and aim to:

**'Facilitate the opportunity for blended childcare** to enable schools and settings to share the task of providing 30 hours early learning and childcare for eligible working families, thus providing parents with a bespoke childcare and early learning service to meet their individual needs

**To develop wraparound and holiday care** for school age children, meeting the needs of working parents across the year

**Supporting the most vulnerable children**, identifying needs, improving transition, sharing expertise and support

**Improving the quality of provision**, enabling practitioners to share best practice e.g. through moderation, sharing approaches to learning and development

Securing a **more seamless transition** into reception class

**Sharing information** e.g. resources, training, expertise

**Strengthening respectful relationships** to enable professional challenge to take place'

Childminders are actively involved in these hubs and play an important part in supporting transitions and blended and wraparound care. Each Hub is overseen by a member of the Early Years and Childcare Team, who attend the meetings, share Local Authority information and make sure that those new to area are invited. The Team leader's previous experience as a childminder means that decision-making takes childminders' perspectives into account, and the draws the trust between childminders and Local Authority personnel built up over the years, as the comment below from a very experienced childminder illustrates:

*What I love about [this local Authority] is it reminds me of the good old days before there was ever Ofsted because I've done it so much longer than you girls. When it was your Local Authority and you build up a rapport with people, they know you, they know how you work and they guide you accordingly. That is something you get with [this local Authority]. It's just like it used to be before Ofsted came on the scene....You had a coordinator and you used to make friends with the coordinator pretty quick.*

### **CASE STUDY (6b): Informal Support Networks**

Childminders in a City location in England also offer twice-termly drop in sessions, but the Local Authority personnel also explained how these were supplemented by the development of informal networks. These are sometimes centred on particular locations or weekly events such as Parent and Toddler groups, as well as regular meetings at commercial venues such as soft play areas. While these networks are not endorsed or monitored by Local Authority staff, they do make sure that new entrants are aware of the locations where they might encounter the informal networks. In focus groups and interviews, it was identified how these groups were sustained by the mutual benefits afforded to members; they discussed online training such as webinars which they have attended and shared information about parents who needed a childminder. The childminders in this Local Authority found training expensive, both in terms of fees and missed income if held during the working day. Although the Local Authority arranged training to take place at different times of the day and on different days, including Saturday and evenings, childminders often struggled to attend because of cost and family/work commitments. Because training tends to prioritise new entrants, some childminders also struggled to find courses with new content. Instead, groups met up regularly to discuss issues such as inspections, managing ratios.

The Local Authority also mentioned the growth of support for childminders via individual Facebook pages. While they welcomed the opportunity for childminders to share concerns and swap ideas, in some sites, they were reticent to endorse particular sites because of the possibility of errors in the advice offered, particularly given the complexity of some aspects of the statutory requirements for Childminders. Instead, they recommended official sites such as Ofsted, PACEY and childcare.co.uk.

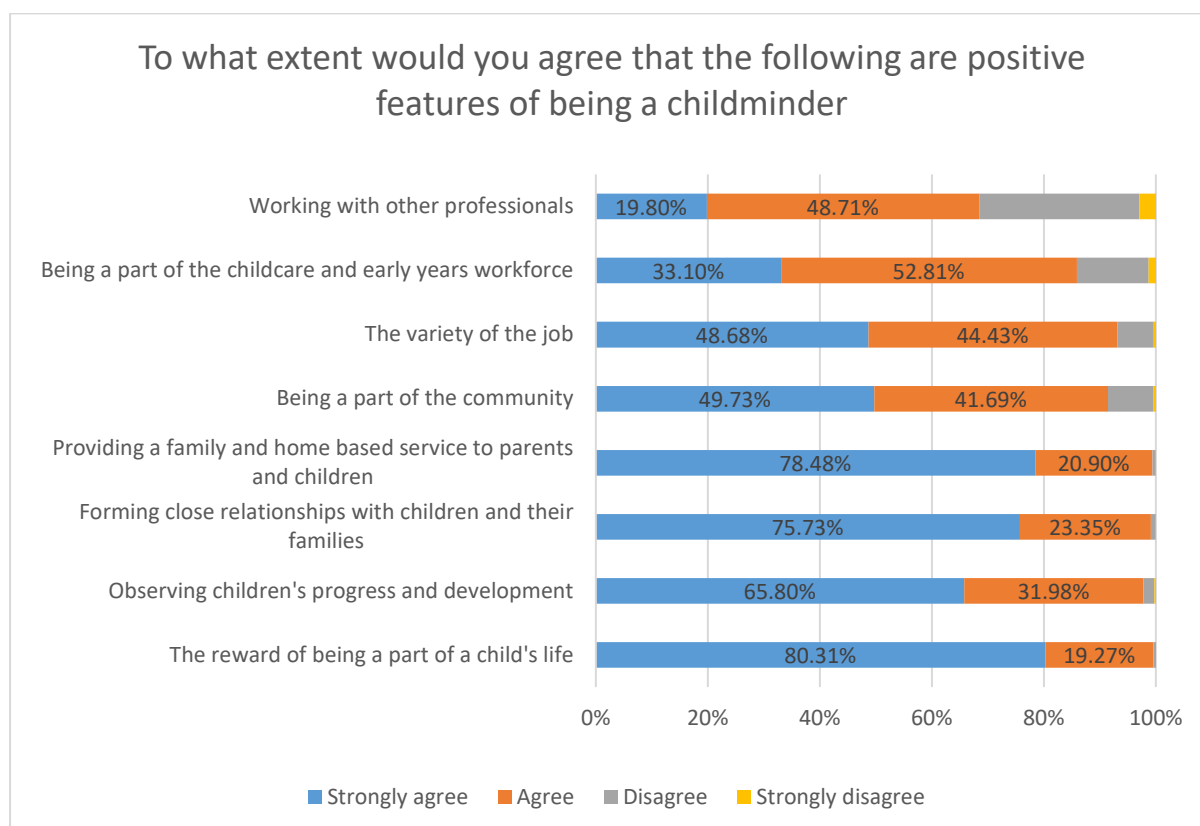
### **CASE STUDY 6A**

In a third case study location childminder drop-in sessions had originally taken place every two weeks, then every two months, now once a term. Decline in numbers was thought to be due to childminders' flexibility in visiting different places of interest.

## The Rewards of Childminding

Participants were asked about the positive features of being a childminder. *The reward of being a part of a child's life; providing a family and home based service to parents and children; and forming close relationships with children and their families* came out as the three highest rated items. Not only were these the three highest rated items in relation to this particular question, but they were the highest rated items for any of the Likert questions. The responses show that the features of working in childminding that are most valued are those relating to working with children and their families in a home based environment. Further, there is evidence that childminders also identify with the rewards of being able to observe children's development.

Figure 40 The Rewards of Childminding



In the open comments, many respondents highlighted the profession as a very rewarding job:

“I do the job because I know I can make a difference to children's lives”.

A few respondents shared that they were childminding a second generation of children, having worked for a number of years. Others highlighted their joy of working with children and families:

“I really love this side of the job, all of the families I look after have become wonderful friends and every day is different, watching the children grow and change and knowing I have had a part in how they will turn out is amazing to me.”



However, Figure 40 also demonstrates that *working with other professionals* and *being a part of the childcare and early years workforce* did not rate as highly amongst respondents and this may relate to wider views on [childminding as a profession](#) that have previously been discussed. The data therefore suggests that the positive aspects of working as a childminder are related to their encounters with children and families as opposed to their wider social role.

## CASE STUDY (7)

### BEYOND CARE; LOVING THE CHILD; RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Childminders contacted during the case study phase reinforced the message that, for them, the role of the childminder extends beyond just caring for the child – for many this meant loving and physically showing affection for the child. A strong sense of responsibility for the welfare of the whole family was also evident across the data. Below are some examples from interviews and focus groups to illustrate this.

An experienced childminder from a City case study location shared some examples to illustrate how she understood the role of the childminder to help parents with parenting skills and to “*look after the whole family*”

*I've had a parent that I think she must have found me on the [online database] as a very young single mum. She had two year funding for her daughter so she came to me in that way. I've also had, through somebody that I used to childmind her mum, I childminded the daughter's son and he had a very, very ill, disabled baby and [the mother] could be whisked away in the middle of the night and so her younger son had behavioural problems because he didn't know, when he woke up, whether mum was going to be there. He got kicked out of nursery. So I supported that family an awful lot. By the time he went to school things had settled a little bit at home. He had that routine and he knew. Equally, another family had domestic abuse. The police took daddy away. So I've done a lot of supporting with that and service families. So when dad is away, sometimes the mums have had issues because they haven't got on with the in-laws or whatever, they haven't had other people to give advice and support.*

*This family with the two year old now, she's in the middle of getting diagnosed with ADHD or/and Autism and such like. She doesn't get support from the family. Really I am her support. So it's more, as they say, not just childminding. [Other participant: We look after the whole...] Yes, the whole family. I mean I reported the problems she had to the council. It wasn't the school that did that. I wasn't childminding her at the time although I had before she went to school. But it is a much wider picture than just childminding, looking after the child but in that child's life, you're part of it.*

Childminders spoke of the satisfaction and pride they felt in enabling another person to go out to work unencumbered by concerns about the welfare of the child:

*Very rewarding. I feel very privileged that families feel really happy that I can... those mums can go out of that door and go off to work. I mean [name of mother], I'm looking after her little boy. So I feel very pleased that they go off...*

One mentioned parents' appreciation that home-based care made them more relaxed that their child's allergies would be carefully monitored, while her colleague shared how she explained her approach to meeting the needs of both parent and child:

*But when a parent came to see me for the first time, what I was saying to them to sell my service to them is how I would want it to be, like you were saying, "I want to make your life as easy as possible so that when you get up in the morning," they can literally just hand us the baby and we've got everything. We provide food, nappies, spare clothes. We're like a fully inclusive service so they don't have to worry about making packed lunches or packing up nappy bags or anything like that. They just hand us the child. But it's to make their life easier. That's how I sell myself to them... I always tell a new parent, "I will love your child and your child will love me. I will love them like they're my own. If that's not for you, I'm not for you. That's how I am." I've only ever had one parent leave because they couldn't cope that their daughter was calling for me in the night but yes, we do. ...]. It's not just looking after the children. It is looking after the parents. I have very intelligent parents who their babies rule the roost at home. You have to say, "They're not in charge. You're in charge." It is giving them the confidence as well to help with their parenting.*

The centrality of childminder's relationship with parents is apparent in comments that, although a childminder would be able to work with children they might not 'take to' straight away, if the relationship with the parent was not good, then looking after the child might not be possible:

*I think when you meet a parent for the first time and they come and see you, because we try and do settling in sessions. I try and chat to them for a while. I think you can judge whether you're on the same page or whether you want the same kind of thing. I think that's important. I mean I've got a difficult child at the minute. But you can work with that because they're only children. If the relationship was to break down with the parent then you couldn't have it. [Other participant] It is team work. We all work together.*

The sense of responsibility does not stop when the childcare arrangement ends, and also extends to the developments of relationship with other members of the childminder's family, as illustrated in the comment below from an interview with another childminder.

*I've made a huge difference with one of the parents. But also subsequently when [the child] left me and was in school, I would make a point of going and chatting to that parent in the playground so that we were still chatting about the behaviour of all of the children actually and actually one of those children is now at the senior school with mine and goes and talks to my children because they knew them because of that interaction in the playground before.*

Some childminders recognised, however, that their sense of responsibility and their concern 'not to let the parents down' could be exploited, even by parents with whom they had developed a strong relationship. The excerpt from a focus group discussion below captures this sense of guilt and the need to manage expectations:

*You have to manage that relationship carefully so that they know there are boundaries but there are flexibilities as well. That's a lesson you learn. The more you do your childminding, that's a big lesson you learn as you go on.*

*It's a very hard thing to do is say no.*

*You feel so bad. Oh my God, the guilt you have is horrible. It really does. It makes you feel so guilty. Sometimes you're thinking because you know their background, you know if they're a single parent mum, you know if she's working all the hours that God sends and that little one is with you. Then she's got nobody else or he's got nobody else and you're just like, "Okay." It's*

yes, yes, yes. But then it gets to a point where it's no and they're really affronted with you. That's the bit.

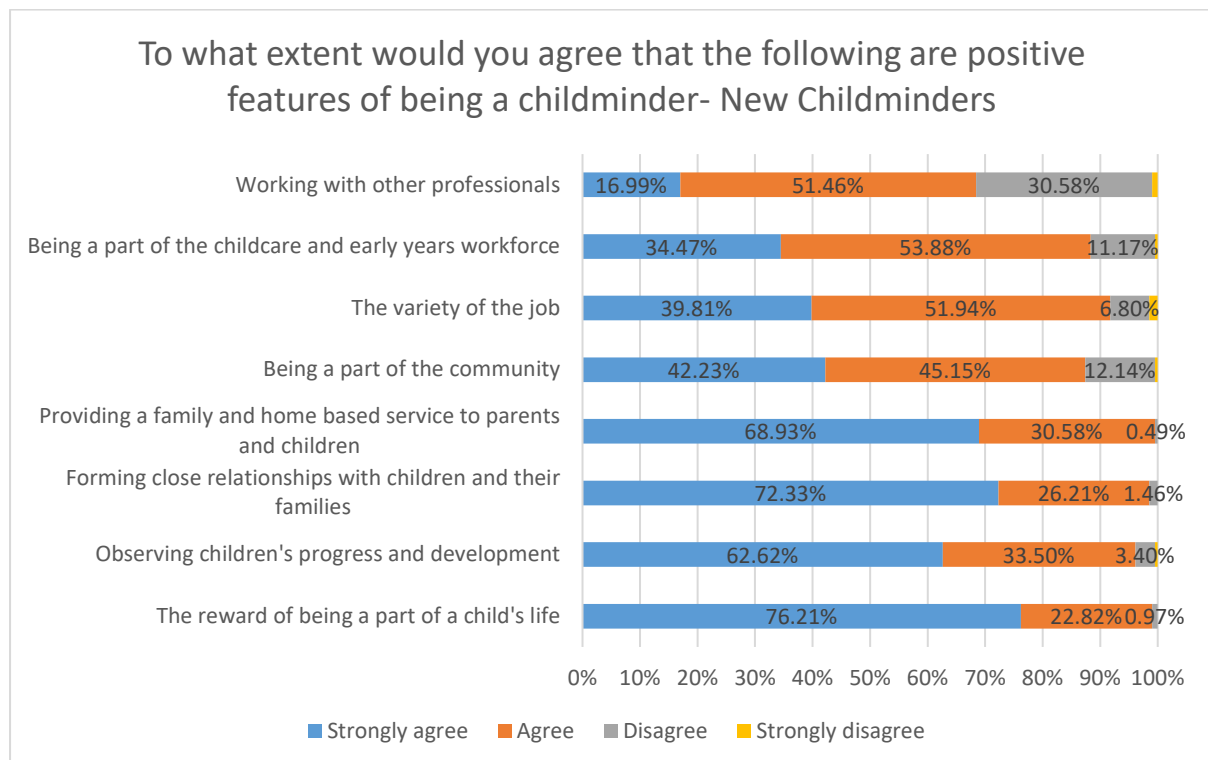
I don't think parents know sometimes the work we do. They don't.

I had it last night and it was [important family celebration]. We had family coming over as soon as I finished work. The parent who I've worked for for, I think, ten years now couldn't understand why her 11 year old couldn't stay another hour. She just couldn't understand it. In the end I said, "Actually no. Get somebody else to come and collect her please at the normal time." So there wasn't a, "Could you?" "Would you?" It was just, "I'm going to be late. She'll need to be with you for another hour."

### New and experienced childminders

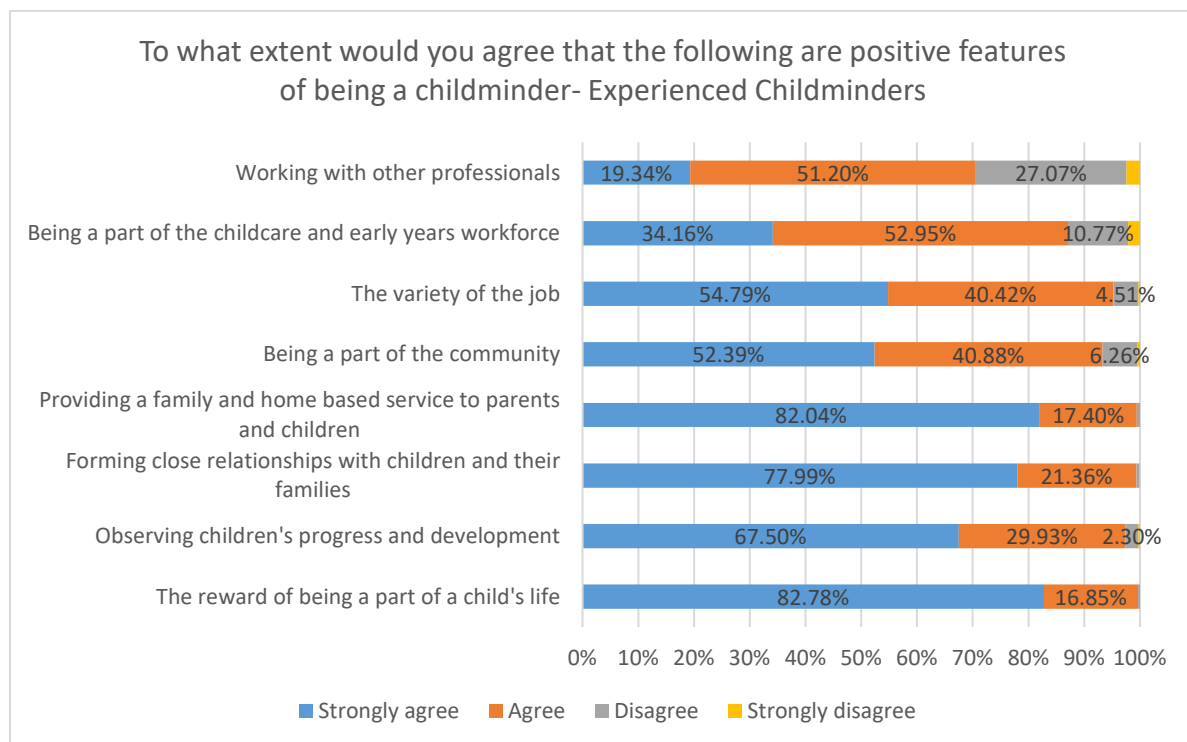
In keeping with the overall sample, new childminders identified the rewards of the job as being most highly rated in relation to working with children and their families. However, there were indications that new childminders were not as positive as the overall sample in regards to some aspects of the role. For example, 78.48% of the whole sample strongly agreed that *providing a family and home based service to parents and children* was a positive feature of childminding, compared to 68.93% of new childminders. New childminders were also less positive about the *variety of the role*, with 39.81% strongly agreeing in comparison to 48.68% of the overall sample. Conversely, *being a part of the community* was ranked higher by new childminders, where 42.23% strongly agreed with the statement in comparison to 29.73% of the whole sample.

Figure 41 The Rewards of Childminding - New Childminders



Experienced childminder’s views were broadly in line with the overall sample, with the exceptions of the strongly agree response being higher for ‘the variety of the job’ and ‘providing a family and home based service to parents and children’. In line with the overall sample, experienced childminders are more positive in their views than new childminders, particularly in relation to strongly agreeing with the variety of the job being a positive feature. While it could be expected that those who have been a childminder for a long time are positive about the professional role that they have worked in for 20+ years, there is something of a paradox when the positivity is not shared amongst new childminders. Are new childminders entering the role with a degree of pessimism (or perceived realism) or are they yet to discover the rewards of the profession?

Figure 42 The Rewards of Childminding - Experienced Childminders



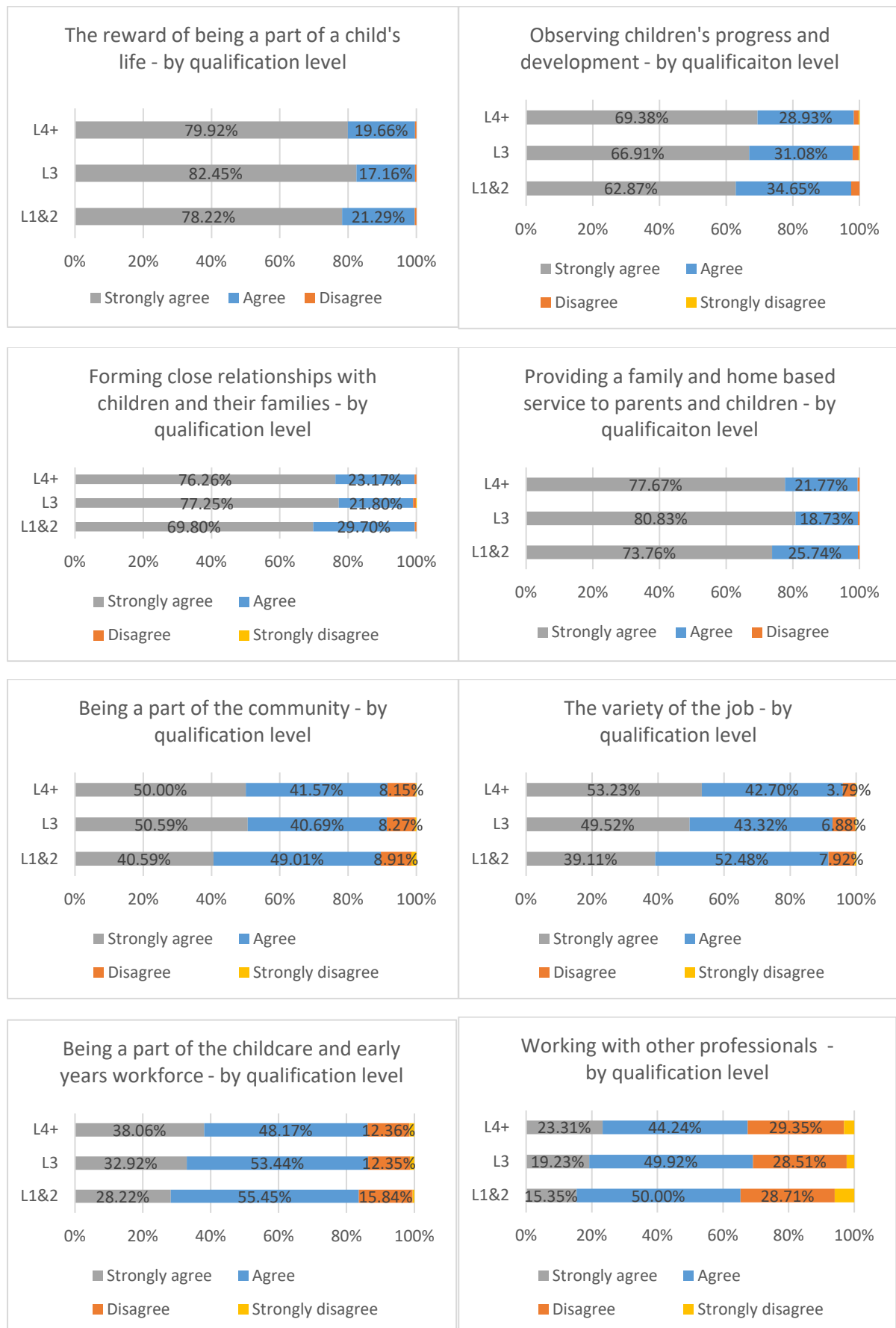
### Qualifications and Rewards of Childminding

Looking at the rewards of childminding by qualification level it is possible to see that there is some evidence that those with higher qualifications are more likely to strongly agree with the statements on the social rewards of childminding. Although the differences are often marginal between the three different qualification groupings, the differences between the Level 1 & 2 subgroup and the Level 4+ subgroup are markedly different when looking at being a part of the CC&EY workforce and working with other professionals, as well as looking at the variety of the job. There is also evidence that those with higher qualifications are more likely to strongly agree that they are a part of the community.

The findings on qualification levels and the social rewards of childminding are interesting when compared to the views of the [profession by qualification level](#), whereby those with higher qualifications were less likely to say that they strongly agreed that childminding was seen as an important part of the CC&EY workforce or that there was an appreciation for the professional role of childminding. One possible explanation is that if being a part of the CC&EY community is seen to

equate with engaging with the community, this may inform the view of not being recognised as an important part of the CC&EY workforce. Further, recognition for the variety of the job could be associated with a more negative view for the appreciation of the profession – in other words, childminders with higher qualifications identify that they have a varied role, but do not think that other people appreciate this. Overall, the impression seems to be that those with higher qualifications appreciate the social rewards of their professional role, but do not think that others have the same appreciation.

Figure 43 Social Rewards of Childminding Compared by Qualification Subgroups

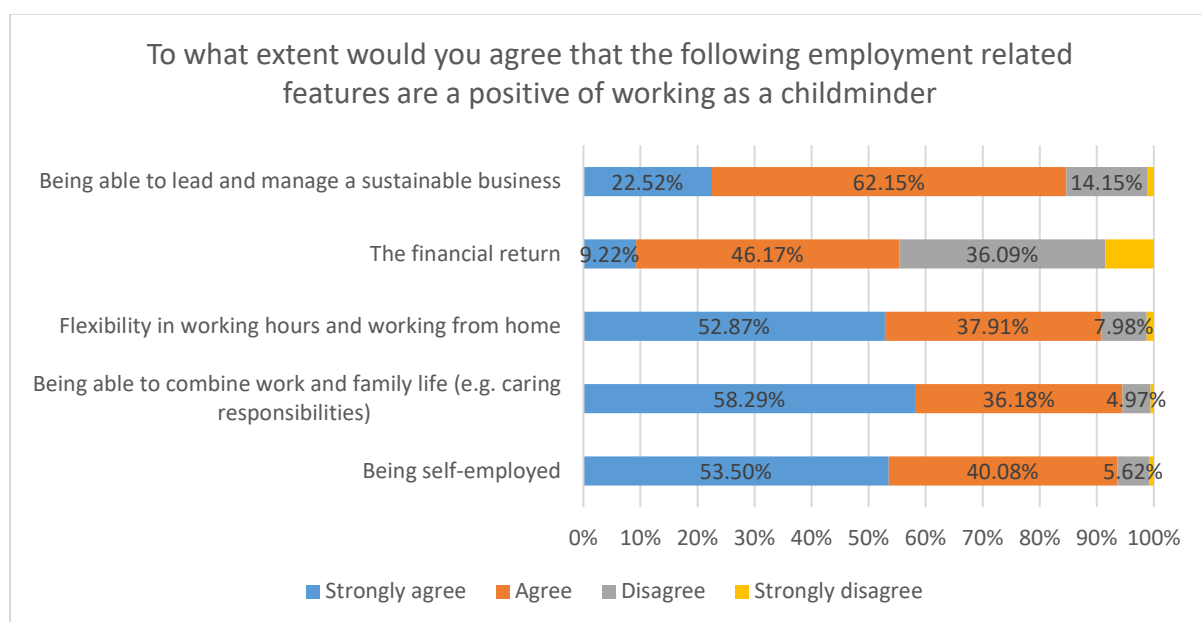


## Rewarding, but Complex

Respondents were also asked about the positives of being a childminder in relation to economic and business features, such as having one’s own business and being able to work flexibly. Here respondents are not only less likely to strongly agree with the positive features of childminding, but also that there are some notable complexities in the positives of being a childminder that are being negotiated by the respondents.

Figure 44 echoes some of the earlier discussed challenges around [sustainability](#). While the sample as a whole can be seen to be broadly positive (either ‘agreeing’ or ‘strongly agreeing’ with the statements) they are less likely to be as positive as they were in relation to the social rewards discussed above.

Figure 44 Positive Employment Features of Working as a Childminder



In particular, the financial return of childminding remains a continued challenge, illustrating the continued issue of being economically viable as a childminder. Difficulties of sick pay, lunch hours, holidays and pensions were identified in the open responses as examples of how complex the issue of economic viability was for childminders.

The economic challenges were also entwined with the complexities of working with families. Sustainability challenges identified by respondents include that childminders may lose families as they move away, change job or school at short notice. Therefore, the sustainability of business is difficult, unpredictable and can change rapidly. However, while the complexities of families’ lives posed an economic challenge to childminders, there were both rewards and challenges for childminders in relation to their own families. For respondents, the prime employment reward was in relation to *being able to combine work and family life*, with the *flexibility in working hours and working from home* also a positive feature. Thus the rewards related more to the social aspects of childminding than the economic features.

However, within the question on the positive employment features of working as a childminder, there were some of the most divided responses, indicating that personal experiences and circumstances interplay. For example, some respondents highlighted that due to difficulty sustaining a self-employed business, they have relied on partners' wages.

“Being able to work from home and spend positive time with my own children has been brilliant. However over 16 years my income has fluctuated due to the numbers of children I have cared for but overall it has not ever reached a level which would have enabled me to manage without my partners wages.”

On the other hand, a few respondents commented that they did earn a good wage, but that this relied on long hours, “this all comes at a cost - I earn a good wage but work 7 days a week, very long hours.” Additionally, respondents suggested their time was impacted by large amounts of paperwork.

Traditionally, childminding has been seen as a suitable profession for those with young children, which was also identified among the respondents. However, it is worth acknowledging the age of the sample, whereby the majority of respondents were 41 years or older. The respondents may, therefore, present a distorted view of childminding that is grounded in a more traditional view.

Comparing responses to the question of being able to combine work and family life in relation to age (with the exception of 16-19 years olds due to the low response rate), it is evident that age appears to make little difference to the responses. The slight exception is that those who are 20-30 years old are slightly more likely to strongly agree that being able to combine work and family life is a popular feature of childminding. Thus, the traditional view of childminding being a profession that combines work and family life remains among those who have a stake in childminding, but the open comments indicate that it is not a simple work-life balance. This is an interesting finding in the context of modern work patterns, where there are a range of options for people to combine work and family life.

#### Being able to combine work and family life (e.g. caring responsibilities) in relation to age

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N =
16 to 19 years old	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4
20 to 30 years old	62.33%	32.19%	4.79%	0.68%	146
31 - 40 years old	59.33%	34.95%	4.98%	0.75%	804
41 - 50 years old	59.03%	35.35%	5.10%	0.52%	1157
51 - 60 years old	55.57%	39.02%	4.90%	0.51%	979
61 + years old	57.92%	36.25%	5.42%	0.42%	240
(blank)	67.92%	30.19%	1.89%	0.00%	53
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>58.29%</b>	<b>36.18%</b>	<b>4.97%</b>	<b>0.56%</b>	

Many comments highlighted the different family arrangements of childminders who look after their own younger or older children, have no children of their own or who are childminding after their own children have left home. A few respondents agreed, “It fits in well when you have a young family”. Some respondents suggested childminding is a flexible way of working from home to be available for their own children, which was preferred over other careers.

“I do however feel the profession is chosen for many with their own children as it's so flexible and fits around family life so well which other career paths do not”.



However, while some respondents identified a benefit of being able to combine work with family life, this was not universal with many respondents commenting on the difficulties they faced.

“I don't think people realise what impact it can have on your own children. I chose the career after my children had grown up so I could concentrate better on the children in my care”.

Some respondents suggested having their own children whilst childminding created an added complexity, as this affects the number of children a person can work with.

“Having your own young children affects the number of children you can look after and therefore limits the income you can generate. So whilst it allows flexibility for families it is not a sustainable option for those without finances to fall back on e.g. a partner with an income.”

Others believed it was more financially viable and better for their own children not to combine childminding with family life.

Beyond the practicalities of whether family life could be combined with childminding, some felt that constructing childminding as a profession for those with young children was seen as problematic as it undermined the professionalism of the sector.

“Some childminders do only use childminding as a way to bring money in for the few years that their children are not in school. These childminders are not seeing it as a professional career choice they are using it as a stopgap until they do not have to pay full-day childcare fees. Others, far fewer now, see it as a long-term profession. All the childminders in my area have been registered for 10+ years there have been others, five, that I know of who have registered and closed within 1-2 years before getting a different job”.

Thus while childminding has been seen as a role that can fit in with family life, many felt that this was at odds with the professional status of childminding, suggesting a need to review what the core beneficial features of the role are.

While there were conflicting views as to how childminding complemented one's own family, there was a sense among some respondents that it was the family nature of childminding that made it unique within the CC&EY sector. Some respondents suggested parents like children to have the “opportunity to develop in a home from home environment”. One respondent who chose a childminder for her child commented:

“I'm not sure that I was looking for a 'professional' to look after my children. I was looking for someone nurturing, who had a bit of life experience and who would provide a 'home from home' environment.”

A few respondents also commented on the importance of a trusting relationship with parents and children, and how built over time this can encourage parents to appreciate the quality childcare provided by childminders. Therefore, there is something to suggest in the open comments that the professionalism of childminding and their earlier identified emphasis on the quality of care that they offer is particular to childminding.

## Discussion

Drawing on the literature review, survey data, and comments from case study interviews and focus groups, this section of the report outlines factors about childminding that make it different from other sections of the early years workforce. This will be followed by examination of the implications of these differences for the sustainability of childminding in the current climate; what is it about childminding that means that numbers periodically fall (and rise)?

As a profession, childminding has a number of unique characteristics, whereby alignment with the wider CC&EY workforce may not always have been in childminders' favour. Childminders' path to professionalism historically has been shaped in reaction to external events, national policy or general workforce issues, rather than by specific childminder-focused strategies and decision-making. Childminders have been fitted into schemes that were designed for others (such as the Early Year Professional Status) or were focused on parents / children / scope of workforce (such as Funded Two-year-olds offer).

The professionalisation of the early years workforce that took place from 1997 onwards had particular implications for childminding (Georgeson and Payler, 2014). Childminders had been included in the Nursery Voucher/ NEG scheme (although this varied between England and Wales and areas within them<sup>8</sup>) and have been inspected against the same regulative frameworks as other kinds of CC&EY services. Childminders were also included in the development of Early Year Professional Status and later Early Years Teacher Status. The message from their inclusion in national initiatives was that childminders are professionals in the same way that other CC&EY occupations (teacher, nursery nurse, nursery officer) are professionals, but childminding is often portrayed as an entry point to the CC&EY sector; see for example the Early Years Career progression map produced by Cache in 2018 in response to The Early Years Workforce Strategy (2017). This places childminding on the same level as unqualified workers and support roles in school. Childminding does not figure in any of the later roles to which individuals might 'progress', which unfortunately can reinforce the impression that it is in some way lesser than other roles and neglects the complexity and uniqueness of childminding practice.

Furthermore, childminding differs from other kinds of CC&EY working in ways that have particular implications for the development of a professional identity. These differences include:

- i. Professionals have agreed standards about what it is to be an acceptable member of that profession. Childminding is not currently a regulated profession with its own set of standards. Professional standards and qualifications for early years educators and Early Years Teachers have been developed for group-based care, which works with different models of CC&EY provision. Childminders feel that their own understandings of quality (which are necessarily closely aligned with parents' perceptions of what counts as a high quality service) are not, however, well captured by these standards, particularly as evidenced in the process of inspection (see [CASE STUDY 1c](#)). This is partly because of a dual focus on support for child and parent (see [CASE STUDY 7](#)); childminders offer both a personalised service for the parent as well as individual benefits to the child. Childminders often share anecdotes about how their home-from-home everyday care supports young children's learning and development in different ways from group-based care. They give compelling examples of how, for some children, their approach to education and care

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.netmums.com/coffeehouse/childcare-1055/choosing-childcare-691/869103-childminder-nursery-education-grant.html>

is more appropriate; some children find group care overwhelming but find the transition into another home much easier. They can also provide examples of the ways in which they offer support and advice for new parents or those experiencing difficulties. They feel that what it takes to be a good childminder is not well understood outside of the profession, and that 'what-it-takes-to-be-a-good-childminder' is not well documented or easily shared beyond the profession. From comments by childminders in Interviews/Focus Group, it seems that 'what it is to be a good childminder' can have a chameleon quality, borne of childminders desire to be the sort of childminder their parent-client wants. Childminders' flexibility and responsiveness is praised by Local Authority members ([Case Study 5b](#)), but can in itself contribute to the absence of childminding.

- ii. Professionals are generally positioned as more powerful than their clients; they can choose to whom they offer their services. Many childminders do indeed make such choices by checking databases for parents seeking childcare and discussing their service with prospective parents before deciding to offer a place. Many childminders say they can take on any child but find it much more difficult to take on any parent (see [Case Study 7](#)). When capacity is small, however, as it is for the care of very young children, managing the numbers of children in their care can be difficult. Losing one child can reduce a childminder's income by a third, while taking on an extra child, taking capacity beyond the stipulated ratios, can entail the extra expense of an assistant. So, although childminders can in theory exercise choice about which children they care for, if they want to maintain their level of income, they have to take children as places become available and maximise the number of hours each child attends. This can, however, be complicated by childminders' sense of responsibility to the parents they support (see [Case Study 7](#)). In one example shared in the case study, a childminder explained how she was continuing to care for a child because of her relationship with the family, despite the fact that this meant she was losing money:

*I've got four on the books at the moment and three of them are what I would call full timers and one I'm carrying and that's difficult. One, I've still got her because I had her brother, I love the child, the family are fabulous, she should've gone to school in September but she's still with me and she's on twelve hours. So, I'm losing four hours a day by keeping her with me but I couldn't just say, "No, sorry, mate, I need more money." That's not - I can't do that - but actually, I'm losing a shedload of money on that child, a shedload.*

Losing 'a shedload' of money when your income is small is not something childminders can sustain for long.

- iii. Professionalisation is a group endeavour; it is a recognition of the commonalities of quality of practice, as well as agreement about what counts as quality in that practice. It is difficult, however, for many childminders to maintain a sense of group endeavour and those that do, often have to work at this themselves to make it happen (see [Case Study 5b](#)). The development of childminding could perhaps be considered more guild-like than professional, in that it could be characterised as the development in practice of knowledge and skill by a solitary worker. When most of your day is spent lone-working, it can be difficult to feel that you are part of the broader community of practice that constitutes CC&EY provision, or develop an understanding of the specialised practice of childminding. Because the body of knowledge about what it is to be a good childminder has not been captured in a set of standards specifically related to childminding, the knowledge of what it is to be a good childminder resides in the heads of individual childminders. Although this might sometimes be brought to the surface in interactions between childminders, and certainly appeared during interviews and focus groups in the case studies, in the absence of concerted group efforts to define what is special about childminding, the identity of childminding

as a profession remains elusive. This means that the particular strengths and needs of childminding as a profession risks being ignored by policy makers, clients, inspectors and the wider CC&EY community.

iv. As found in the survey, childminders are very different people with different backgrounds and CC&EY histories, which makes it more difficult to establish a group identity and agreement about what constitutes being a good childminder. People come into childminding for many different reasons, and their motivations are many and complex:

- a. Childminding is often undertaken as a temporary career diversion from another professional career trajectory; a nursery teacher might take up childminding while his/her children are young
- b. Some childminders are parents (mainly mothers) who want to earn money and/or feel that they are still in employment/part of the CC&EY workforce when at home looking after with their own children before they start school
- c. Childminding appeals to those who prefer to be self-employed and set their own agendas, make their own plans and change them at a moment's notice in response to children's interests
- d. Others report a deep-seated sense of caring, of doing something well that is of use to another parent and which offers particular benefits to the child, often connected to a sense of joy and fulfilment in being with children:

*That's how I felt when I first started. I love babies. I would happily look after anybody's baby any time. I was thinking, "Oh wow. I'm getting to look after these babies and being paid for it." It was just like a dream job.*

v. Childminders generally work on their own, from their own home, as self-employed sole traders. This has wide-ranging implications, both for the range of knowledge and skills required to succeed, as well as for the development of a sense of professional identity

- a. As lone workers, there are practical difficulties associated with doing many of the things that group-based CC&EY practitioners do, such as attending review meetings for children with special educational needs, taking part in training during the working day or recording observations while working. On the latter point, childminders in case studies were making creative use of technology (Facebook, WhatsApp groups with parents, online and offline documentation of children's progress to share with parents).
- b. For people whose motivation is founded on relationships (as explored in the description of their relationship with parents – see [Case Study 7](#)), being a lone worker can bring particular challenges; when tricky situations arise, there is no-one to share the problem with.
- c. As sole traders, childminders need information about financial and legislative requirements, but spend most of their days uncoupled from the rest of profession who might be able to offer guidance
- d. Childminders' work location is their own home. This can lead to complications for other members of the family who have to share their homes and toys with other children, although childminders also report benefits for their own children who learn about caring for the needs of others at different ages from themselves. Even when children are no

longer living at home, caring for other people's children can limit opportunities for childminders to take holidays outside term time.

- e. Childminding can also offer opportunities for family members to work together – husband and wife, mother and daughter, aunt and niece. A husband and wife who attended one case study focus group explained how having two people working together overcame the problems of lone working, enabled them to share tasks according to their individual strengths and to work together to build a successful business. However, the survey data suggests that co-working is not a guarantee of a strength in numbers.
- vi. Childminding presents other particular practical, structural difficulties
  - a. Use of own home impacts on the fabric of the building to meet health and safety requirements as well as the amount of attention a childminder's own family can expect.
  - b. For many childminders, their rate of pay per child per hour is low, particularly if they are caring for a child whose parents are in receipt of government funding for three- and four- year olds. This makes that fluctuation in number of children on roll challenging.
  - c. Childminders are dependent on other people working; most parents send their child to childminders while they themselves work. If they stop working, they do not need a childminder and the childminder's income suddenly drops.
  - d. Supply and demand issues make it difficult to manage numbers over the medium and longer term. This makes childminders at risk of precarity if workforce conditions change. Many childminders in the case studies referred to uncertainties of income as a reason that might prompt them to leave the profession in favour of something with a more reliable income. (Open comments in the survey also echoed this view). This was particularly true for childminders who were also single parents.
- vii. The flexibility of childminders mean they have a particularly important place to play in the landscape of CC&EY services.
  - a. Childminders greater flexibility in hours and activities enables them to fill short-term gaps in the system for examples to make up parents' entitlement to 30 hours of childcare, or the provision of good quality places for babies which are often in short supply. They are also able to offer longer hours, evening and wrap around care, as well as providing a bridge between home and setting, particularly for children who are not well suited for group-based care.
  - b. Childminders have an important role to play in supporting social mobility for children (by offering individualised provision (the bridge between home and setting) to help children to learn about the ways of doing, being and saying the expected in educational provision, to support parents to work and, potentially, to enable themselves to move on to other kind of employment in the education sector.
- viii. The continuance of childminding as a profession relies on childminders developing relational agency (Edwards, 2006) – ways of building knowledge about who to ask about tricky issues specific to childminding, paired with a readiness to share the knowledge that they themselves have

developed during lone working. There are several recognisable ways of enabling or managing relational agency:

- a. Local Authority support; generic and bespoke training designed for childminders and their particular forms of practice, focusing on both support for the child and support for parents; someone familiar to answer questions who is 'at the end of the phone'. This works best if this person is a kind of cultural broker, someone who knows about being a childminder and about the system in which childminders must operate (see [Case Study 2](#))
- b. Hubs; local groups of childminders, nurseries and schools who operate under a Local Authority umbrella, but which are self-organising, to smooth transitions and share ideas, information and resources (see [Case Study 6a](#)).
- c. National organisations (Ofsted; CIW; PACEY; childcare.co.uk) who offer advice and respond to questions. This kind of online consulting is often supplier, rather than demanded and can miss the genuine 'voice' or 'ear' of childminders (see [Case Study 1](#)).
- d. Online support via independent Facebook pages. While some sites (Sarah Neville's 'Knutsford Childminding' site was often mentioned: see [Case Study 3](#)) are trusted by childminders as 'go to' sites when they want to find something out, Local Authority personnel have an ambiguous relationship with these. They are seen as potentially useful but need monitoring before a Local Authority could recommend them – and Local Authorities do not currently have resources for this kind of monitoring.
- e. Informal networks offer the opportunity for interactions between childminders at places where they happen to congregate, such as mother and toddler groups, children's centres as well as soft play areas and country parks. As well as sharing information and concerns, these interactions contribute to the management of supply and demand (see [Case Study 6b](#)).
- f. Formal networks ([Case Study 6a](#)) include childminding agencies and offer targeted support, bespoke training as well as opportunities for experienced childminders to use their knowledge and skills to support new entrants to the profession.

The importance of relational agency extends to the local systems of support in which childminders are embedded. Individual childminders mentioned that they had met the colleagues who now form their main source of support through attendance at face to face training events. Local Authority managers also recognised the importance of relational agency in sustaining their own systems:

*We've got a team structure, but you wouldn't feel that... I think it's because we've got those relationships. If you took out of our teams all the people that know the people that have worked with them, we probably wouldn't stay there. I think it's built on sort of existing relationships and it's not official. I think if I wasn't there things might change (Local Authority Manager – [Case Study 2](#)).*

Several Local Authority personnel sought to convey a sense of constant availability of support, by describing themselves as being 'on the end of the phone'.

*I think quite often when we go and visit a childminder, you will coach and mentor them, but sometimes you're the only adult they might see so sometimes they offload. So, you become a bit of a counsellor as well. We're there at the end of this phone. I have them calling me at ten o'clock at night because they think they want to report something and should they, shouldn't*

*they, and things like that. I will answer my phone, which I know I shouldn't but I do sometimes.* (Local Authority Manager – [Case Study 2](#)).

This kind of constant availability and connection was echoed by childminders, who recalled being contacted by anxious parents in the early hours of the morning.

- ix. Childminding makes particular emotional demands, because of the close relationship built up with children and their families, especially for those childminders who work with children over long periods. While some childminders might take a more detached view (according to our participants), the childminders in the case studies described their strong sense of responsibility to children and their families, especially for those experiencing disadvantage. Edwards notes this moral aspects of relational agency and 'the need for a stronger connection of individual selves with the common good (Taylor, 1991)' reflecting Shotter's call for a relational ethics (Shotter, 1993). Such a disposition is at odds with the individualistic ambition perhaps underpinning the Cache career map mentioned earlier and seems to come from a rather different kind of motivation from that expressed by practitioners in CC&EY settings. Concerns to teach and advise parents about childcare, talking openly about how parents might handle the emotional side of another woman loving their child, and pride in helping another mother out to work (see [Case Study 7](#)) suggest that deep-seated intelligent caring (Arnold, 2005) and relationality. Intelligent Caring is a particular disposition:

*Care involves more than a feeling or attitude of warmth towards a person or an experience. Intelligent caring embodies within it attention, engagement and an assessment of the consequences of care. The intelligent carer is mindful of the context in which the need for care arises, and mindful of the need to offer support which mobilises the other's coping strategies in preference to developing co-dependency.*

Arnold, 2005: 9

Being mindful of the context of the anxious parent leaving her child to go out to work leaves the childminder absorbing the anxiety and absolving the parent of the guilt of combining work and career – while also recognising that in doing this, the childminder himself/herself is possibly sacrificing his/her progress along the career trajectory. The emotional labour here is considerable, but has yet to be thoroughly investigated – and also extends to intelligent-caring for other members of the profession.

### Implications for future work

- Childminders' comments show that they are actively looking for a community of practice. They recognise that there is a tradition of relational agency - "there's a lot of interaction among childminders" - that supports Childminders with information about supply and demand. Such a community of practice will not happen without support for and coordination of the interactional spaces where childminders can meet.
- Several of the routes identified as supporting the development of relational agency have been affected by cuts to Local Authorities and Children's Centres in the last decade. Development of understanding what it is to be a good childminder is informed by interactions between childminders at training sessions, parent and toddler groups and Children Centres– all of which have been threatened by cuts to local services.

- Childminders are opting instead for online training, which is cheaper and more convenient. In addition, both CIW and Ofsted are moving towards online processes for submission of registration documentation. This means that there are fewer opportunities for childminders to have face to face encounters where they might build connections and relationships with other childminders and with Local Authority personnel, so that they know who to ask when they need help and advice.
- What counts as good expert childminding according to the members of the profession, parents and other stakeholders needs to be made explicit. It is different from what counts as good practice in group CC&EY settings, because of the special things that being home based offers, because of the different ways that learning and development can happen and because of their particular relationship with parents – advisory, facilitative, intimate, affective and ‘private’.
- The particular advantages which childminding offers needs to be more widely promoted; childminding offers a service for children that is homelike, offers care for siblings and relationships with an extended family, helps parents with parenting and helps parents juggle careers; individualised care to suit the needs of particular children. Survey data clearly demonstrates that childminders do not feel that their unique offer is being shared (or understood) by the wider CC&EY community or parents.
- Childminders could be part of services to support new childminders into the profession as well as providing mutual support for existing childminders. This would offer some career progression for experienced childminders as well as making use of their practical knowledge and skills.
- Childminders’ everyday practice remains unseen and undocumented. Childminding can entail a particular kind of intelligent caring; this needs to be surfaced, explored and recognised. The ‘career’ childminder’s skills and dispositions should be captured and foregrounded in standards and qualifications and employed to support social mobility and mental health of working parents and their children
- Childminders need cultural brokers to make sure their voices are heard ([See Case Study 2](#)) and their perspectives are considered when decisions about changes with the sector are made.

The current context makes it difficult for childminding to act as system with a common purpose. A cursory analysis of childminding as an Activity System shows that Childminders themselves (subjects) are diverse; their object/motives vary; values are diverse but deeply held; their conceptual tools often implicit; many of the rules were designed for someone else in another profession or another industry. If childminding is not an activity system, and childminders seldom feel that they belong to a community of practice, where do they fit in the figured world of CC&EY practice/provision? Childminders can resent the position of ‘just a childminder’ or ‘babysitter’ on offer to them, but feel powerless to change this.



## Appendix One: Literature Review on the sustainability of childminders in England and Wales

### Introduction

Childminding is one form of childcare and early years (CC&EY) service in England and Wales. In both countries, this care is usually provided in the childminder's home; is regulated and inspected; and provided by self-employed persons. Until the turn of the century, childminders in England offered the majority of all CC&EY places, a trend that has been reversed since, with a decline in childminder places. This literature review draws together information that may illuminate the reasons for a decline in childminders and places in England and Wales. The review considers how demographic changes have influenced the demand for CC&EY services, alongside policy initiatives that have shaped the regulation of services; provided support for provision and parents' uptake; and sought to shape perceptions of CC&EY in terms of its benefits for children, families and the state. The review sets out an overview of childminding in England and Wales and its characteristic features before considering issues of supply and demand, taking into consideration the business operations of childminders and working conditions.

## A Summary of Places

The data on childminders illustrates a decline in childminders and places at childminders during the past twenty years. The decline has to be understood in relation to the whole CC&EY sector, the extension of other CC&EY institutions and patterns of parental uptake.

### *England*

In England, the number of places at childminders had steadily increased until 1996. However, places at centre-based provision grew more steeply. The National Childcare Strategy (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) promoted the extension of childcare and early years places and introduced a number of benefits to support parental (maternal) employment, while recognising the developmental advantages of CC&EY services for children. Both demand and supply led subsidies were introduced to support the expansion and uptake of childcare places. From 2001, Ofsted took on the inspection of childminders in England, previously conducted by local authorities, and from 2008 childminders are expected to work within the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) framework, emphasising the early education of young children.

Since 1997 the number of childminders and places have declined and centre-based places providing full-time CC&EY places have surpassed registered places at childminders in England. By the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 childminders were registered for 18 per cent of all childcare places or 240,700 places, in contrast to 81 per cent of places registered with providers on non-domestic premises or 1.1 million places (Office for Standards in Education, 2019a). This is a 2 per cent decline since 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 and a 19 per cent decline since 31<sup>st</sup> August 2015. There are no statistics on the number of children cared for by home childcarers, like nannies and au-pairs. Despite the drive to establish childcare for working parents, only 57 per cent of Local Authorities in England reported to have enough childcare for parents working full-time (Colman and Cottell, 2019).

The decline in childminders and places at childminders is the result of less people applying to be registered and more childminders leaving the sector. Between 2017 and 2018 initial applications to be registered fell from 3,950 to 2,980. During the application process 14 per cent in 2017 and 16 per cent in 2018 potential childminders withdrew (Office for Standards in Education, 2019c). During the three months between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 544 childminders joined the register but 1,325 left (Office for Standards in Education, 2019b). Other childcare providers do not show a net loss of providers for the same period. Part of the explanation of this net loss of childminders is that providers that have been judged as 'require improvement' in their last inspection are leaving the sector. They counted for 20 per cent of leavers in contrast to 5 per cent of all active providers (Office for Standards in Education, 2019a).

Table 1: Childminders, home childcarers, providers and places

<b>England</b>		
Practicing childminder providers spring 2018 (Ofsted)	40,900	
Registered childminder and assistants, spring 2018	47,800	
Registered childminder places (Ofsted)	243,300	
Childminder and related occupations 2018 employed and self-employed (NOMIS) (ONS 2019)	91,100	
Childminder and related occupations 2018 self-employed	56,600	62%
Childminder and related occupations 2018 employed	34,300	38%
Childminder and home childcarer application granted 2018 (Ofsted 2019)	4,780	
Childminder applications granted 2018 (Ofsted 2019)	2,390	57%
Home childcarer (nanny) applications granted 2018 (Ofsted 2019)	2,380	43%

Home childcarers are not required to register with Ofsted. However, if parents hope to claim the childcare element of working tax credit or employer supported Childcare Vouchers parents must employ nannies who are registered with Ofsted.

The emphasis New Labour (1998-2010) and following governments placed on the education of the youngest members of society, the expansion of CC&EY providers and places, and the extension of free early education, observed over the past twenty years, has brought to the fore some differences in childminders' understanding of their task and approach. They saw themselves providing a family like environment for children, in which the emphasis is on nurturing relationships with children (Harries et al., 2004). For example, when the Nursery Education Grant was introduced in England and childminders were eligible under certain conditions (including being part of a childminder network) some childminders were reluctant, because they saw their main task was to care for children and not 'school' them (Harries et al., 2004). There appears to be a misunderstanding of what Funded Early Years Education entails and childminders thought that this would require them to offer something that is different to the 'normal' work of a childminder and requires an Ofsted rating as 'outstanding' or 'good' (Skipp and Hopwood, 2017).

Although there is an indication that childminders construct their professional role as being in some way unique within CC&EY, it remains difficult in England to overcome the hierarchy that places childminders at the bottom of the CC&EY workforce and to challenge the discourse that situates CC&EY as substitute mothering (Fauth et al., 2011). In this respect not much has changed since the 1990s (Mooney et al., 2001a). In times of austerity, the integration of centre and home based services may serve as budget saving devices, "This is the case where centre-based care serves the 'normal' working hours and closely cooperates with home-based providers for more flexibility, condemning the latter to the lowest paid, lowest qualified and yet the toughest parts of the job" (Bauters and Vandebroek, 2017, p. 394).

Another indicator for the lack of status of childminders is the classification framework of the annual Labour Force Survey. Occupations labelled 6122 provides statistics for 'childminders and related occupations', which includes nannies and au-pairs, as well as childminder assistants who are not registered with Ofsted (Simon, 2019, Office for National Statistics, 2019a).

## Wales

After the devolution of Wales, childcare policy aimed to address children's rights, equal opportunities for women and social inclusion. Childcare became a major issue to address the child poverty strategy in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004), by allowing parents to engage in paid work and by preparing children for school as a stepping stone to becoming an economically active citizen (Ball, 2013). Childcare policy is made at national and regional level, but delivered locally (Penn and Randall, 2005). Ball (2013) observed that at regional level officers framed childcare as an anti-poverty strategy, including persuading parents to become active in the labour market and some of them becoming part of the childcare labour force. At the local level, childcare was seen as supporting vulnerable families. The growing interest in early education as a foundation for lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and future health and employment (Dallimore, 2019) signals a shift towards a broader understanding of the benefits of CC&EY. It requires affordable and high-quality childcare. Yet, to move the CC&EY agenda forward, explicit considerations should take into account the vision of CC&EY services and its purpose, who should pay and how should the services be structured, organised and delivered (Dallimore, 2019).

Between 1991 and 1994 a faster growth of places in Wales than in England took place, but that was largely 'catch-up'. By 2003, there were on average 8.6 formal places per 100 children (0-24) compared to England's 13 per 100, with regional differences of between just under three and 17 places per 100 children. By December 2014 this had improved to an average of 30 places per 100 children, ranging between 16 and 48 places per 100 children in local authorities (Dallimore, 2016). In March 2017 there were 2,340 registered childminders with 16,531 places, which is a proportion of 19.6 per cent of all children's day care places. The following year there was a decrease to 2,201 providers registered for 16,184 places, which is a proportion of 19.5 per cent of all children's day care places (Welsh Government, 2018b).

In March 2018 there were 2,201 childminders with 16,184 places registered with CIW. Compared to the previous year it presents a decline by 139 providers and a loss of 347 places. It reflects 141 newly registered childminders with 1,159 places and 270 providers leaving the sector resulting in the loss of 1,601 places. At the same time the number of full day care providers increased by 41 to 749 with 31,197 registered places (Welsh Government 2019a). Taking a larger timescale into consideration, the number of places at childminders has increased from 12,081 in March 2012 to 16,531 in March 2017 (Crocker et al. 2018).

The Welsh Childcare Action plan (2002) cemented a split between education and care. While '*Building a Brighter Future*' (Welsh Government, 2013) sought to bring together care and education it does not go far enough, whereby the Graham Review (2014 in Dallimore, 2016) calls for integration of education and care. An integration of early education and care requires a new single quality framework to cover education and care from birth to seven and an integrated regulative framework combining National Minimum Standards for Daycare and Childminding (Welsh Government, 2016) and the Foundation Phase (Welsh Government, 2015); a single inspection regime and single Ministerial responsibility. Yet, the split between education and care continues. Unless funded for delivering education, childcare providers in Wales are not working with the Foundation Phase but have to maintain the Regulations and National Minimum Standards: Childminders or Day care and play. Childcare policy is mainly framed as a measure against poverty, labour market participation and building of human capital (Dallimore, 2016). The Childcare Play and Early Year Workforce Plan (Welsh Government, 2017b) states that local authorities can decide whether to deliver the Foundation Phase nursery provision for three to four year olds through maintained nursery, the PVI sector or childminders.

In contrast to England there is a stronger element of voluntary organisations in CC&EY services. *Flying Start* aims to compensate for the inability of the market to deliver for children from economically deprived families. It contains a number of elements, like access to advanced health visiting services, access to antenatal to four years, high quality childcare provision and parenting support. Childcare can be provided by childminders (Waters, 2016). However, then the childminder must hold at least a Level 3 qualification.

The Welsh Government (2019b) allocates an additional £7.7 million to support delivery of the Childcare Offer of 30 hours early education and childcare for up to 48 weeks of the year. Of these £6.5 million funded 12 individual projects. Parents are able to access the 30 hours early education and childcare based on eligibility criteria of employment, earnings and child's circumstances. (The 30 hours offer is also available in England).

## Demand for places

### England

In 2018, 66 per cent of parents of children (0-14 years) used formal childcare. Forty per cent of children up to the age of two and 88 per cent of three to four year old children accessed formal childcare. Once children start school the proportion declines again (Department for Education, 2018a). Eight per cent of children up to two years of age were cared for by childminders, 6 per cent of three to four year olds, 7 per cent of five to seven year old children, just 2 per cent of 8-11 year old children and only a very small number of secondary school aged children (Department for Education, 2018a). The figures demonstrate that childminders are typically providing care for younger children.

There are inevitable geographical variations in the provision of childminding places. For example, research on the relatively low availability of childcare place in London, England, showed, firstly a lower number of childminders in Greater London compared to other areas in England and recommends a pan-London subsidised training scheme and start-up offer to new childminders, which could be delivered by PACEY or the local authority (McNeil and Cory, 2017).

### Wales

Almost all four year old children in Wales are in maintained schools (Dallimore, 2016), taking up their entitlement of up to 10 hours free early education. In 2015, 88 per cent of three year old children were in maintained provision, nursery classes in maintained schools. However, there is regional variation in these figures.

Parents in Wales use mainly informal, unpaid childcare and childminders represent only seven per cent of those who look after children (Welsh Government, 2019a). However, these statistics include older children and it is not clear whether families use more than one form of childcare. Of the children under the age of two who are using a form of formal childcare, under 20 per cent were attending a childminder. Once three and four year old children are eligible to access early education, the proportion of children attending childminders declines.

Due to availability and attitude, informal childcare remains the preferred or only option for many families (Smith et al., 2009, Welsh Government, 2019a). This attitude may be rooted in strong communities in Wales, with less migration (Charles and Davies, 2005) or a continuation of community work and solidarity developed in mining communities (Parry, 2005). Informal childcare allows mothers to limit the use of formal childcare and to cover gaps (Bryson et al., 2006, Ball, 2013). It is

difficult to differentiate between preferences for informal childcare or lack of availability. In the National Survey Wales (Welsh Government, 2019a) only 42 per cent confirmed that they might use pre-school childcare not provided by family or friends. A mapping exercise of childcare capacity in Wales showed that existing CC&EY providers were not able to cover potential demand, especially in rural areas (Thomas et al., 2017). This report also showed that childminders were clustered in the south east and the north of Wales and were a more prevalent childcare provider in lower employment areas. Only 43 per cent of Welsh councils reported having enough childcare places for working parents (Colman and Cottell, 2019).

The National Survey for Wales 2018/19 reports that about a fifth of children used childcare provided in Welsh and English, but most, 69 per cent, attended mainly or all English provision. However, 13 per cent of parents would prefer childcare provided mainly or all in Welsh, 31 per cent in Welsh and English equally and 55 per cent mainly or all in English (Welsh Government, 2019a). The survey covers childcare for children of all ages and information for young children is somewhat dated. In 2009, among pre-school children, 23 per cent took up formal childcare provision (group provider or childminder) that used Welsh exclusively or almost exclusively, 61 per cent that used Welsh sometimes and 32 per cent that did not use Welsh at all (Smith et al., 2011).

### Who are the childminders

Most childminders in England and across time were female, between 35-44 years old, White, married and had children. Hardly any women were younger than 25 or older than 54 years. Most childminders work about five years and then the number declines steadily (Gelder, 2002, Mooney et al., 2001b, Mayall and Petrie, 1977, Mooney et al., 2001a, Fauth et al., 2011). Their motivation to work as a childminder is strongly linked to their personal circumstances.

The Labour Force Survey data for Wales shows that almost all people classified as childminder or related occupations are female (Nomis, 2019). Childminders tend to be between 31 and 60 years old. A higher proportion of childminders age between 51 and 61+ may indicate that childminders can receive funding to provide care for related children as long as they live in a different home.

### Summary

The data on the number of childminder places in England and Wales not only illustrates the decline in childminder numbers, but also signals how childminders are operating within a mixed market economy. As such, it is not clear to what extent the decline in childminders is as the result of a rise in other forms of CC&EY provision or if other CC&EY providers are filling gaps in the market. There is some indication of geographical variation in how the market operates, but the level of detail as to how geography impacts is relatively limited.

The data on childminding provision also suggests that childminders largely care for younger children and that this may be the result of different policy initiatives and funding streams. As is discussed further in the next section, there have been different initiatives across England and Wales to both boost the level of CC&EY provision and stimulate demand through both supply and demand subsidies. However, such subsidies have been variably available for different CC&EY providers, which appears to be having consequences for how the market is operating.

## Policy context

The change in the number of childminder places has coincided with a number of changes in the registration and regulation of childminders in England and Wales<sup>9</sup>. Over time and in each of the two countries structural requirements have been implemented, ideas of the pedagogical work articulated and financial incentives and/or support for families established. Below outlines the core structural developments in the registration requirements and process of becoming a childminders in the respective countries, including outlining associated costs and incentives.

### England

Childminders in England are people who look after one or more children they are not related to for payment or reward. The care takes place in a home that is not the child's own. The majority register with Ofsted on the Early Years Register (EYR) because they look after children aged 0 to 5, but those who look after five to seven year olds need only to register on the Childcare Register (CR).

Conditions of registration are that the applying person is 18 years or older, has the right to work in the UK and is allowed to work with children. In order to register with Ofsted on the EYR, applicants have to undertake Paediatric First Aid training, introductory childminder training and have to have an enhanced DBS check and a completed healthcare declaration booklet. Once childminders start to look after children they have to have public liability insurance.

The first Ofsted inspection should take place within 30 months of signing up to the EYR, followed by an inspection at least once in every four year inspection cycle. Ofsted aims to have made a decision within 12 weeks. In 2017 this aim was achieved for 54 per cent of applications from childminders but declined to 44 per cent the following year (Office for Standards in Education, 2019c). When other people raise concerns about the CC&EY provided, an inspection can also take place. Childminders receive a call up to five days before the inspection. There are four possible outcomes: outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. Childminders rated as inadequate will be inspected again within six months. Ofsted publishes the report of all inspections online within 10 days.

From 2017, all three and four year old children in England have access to 15 hours early education over 38 weeks per annum. Children of working parents can access a top-up of 15 hours childcare over 38 weeks per year. The government also funds 15 hours early education for disadvantaged two-year old children over 38 weeks a year. In order to provide the 30 hours childcare free to parents or the 15 hours funding for the care of two-year old children, childminders must be judged by Ofsted as 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' or awaiting inspection. However, local authorities differ in their promotion of 'good' and 'outstanding' childcare providers as those eligible for Early Years Funding (Georgeson et al., 2014). This government funded CC&EY provision can be split between different providers and the hours of childcare spread over more than 38 weeks. Funded places can only be offered to children of relatives if it the child is not cared for in the child's home and is provided by a registered childminder.

Alternatively to Ofsted, childminders can register with a Childminding Agency since 2014. Childminder Agencies, offer flexible childcare with a replacement childminder if the regular childminder is ill or on

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<sup>9</sup> A list of acts and regulations can be found in [Appendix Two](#).

Table 1 provides an overview of the framework of childminding in England and Wales at the time of writing.

leave. The Childminding Agencies are self-financed. They offer business support, Continued Professional Development (CPD), networking and quality assurance (Robb, 2014). Childminders may remain self-employed or may become employees of the Childminding Agency and usually have to pay a joining fee. Ofsted inspects the Childminder Agency and not individual childminders of this network. A report on the initial trial period of Childminder Agencies (Yates et al., 2014) describes reluctance by childminders in giving up their independence, and that some of the myths surrounding these agencies highlights the need to carefully consider cost, charges and fees and expansion opportunities (e.g. matching services for parents and childminders, support for families, alternatives for other forms of CC&EY provision). One of the first Childminder Agencies set up in September 2014, Total Childcare Service (TLC) in East Sussex offered flexible packages of different services, including childminders (Robb, 2014). The take-up of Childminder Agencies is slow. In May 2019 there were 11 Childminder Agencies but only six had childminders on roll (Office for Standards in Education, 2019a, Graven, 2019).

Staff:child ratio in England is prescriptive in the restriction of the maximum of six children under the age of eight cared for at any one time. The rule that there can be only one child under the age of one has exemptions in the case of siblings, the childminders own baby and in order to maintain continuity (Department for Education, 2017).

To become a childminder, an individual will undertake mandatory training in safeguarding, first aid, and food hygiene, as well as training that will help them meet the requirements of the EYFS framework. [A range of CC&EY qualifications are also available.](#)

Childminders in England, like all CC&EY services, have to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), with its overarching principles, areas of learning and development and early learning goals (Department for Education, 2017). Children are seen as unique, benefitting from enabling environments and positive relationship. The EYFS supports a play based pedagogy, acknowledges that children learn at an individual pace, yet aims to promote children's school readiness. Formative assessment for understanding the child and planning activities play an important role, as do the progress checks at two years of age and the assessment at the end of EYFS (Department for Education, 2017).

### *Wales*

Childminding in Wales is childcare provided by one or more people for children from birth up to the age of 12 years within a domestic premises that is not the child's own home for more than two hours per day for reward. Like in England a childminder has to be 18 years or older, must have the right to work in the UK, needs a health reference from their doctor, undertake paediatric first aid training and provide Disclosure and Barring Service Checks (DBS) for themselves and anyone else in the household 16 years of age and older. Up until September 2019 they had to complete the pre-registration training CYPOP5, 'Understand how to set up a Home-Based Childcare Service' which is now replaced by new training developed and delivered by PACEY Cymru, the 'Introducing home-based Childcare' and 'Preparing for childminding practice' units of the new Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (CCPLD) Level 3 qualification.

Childminders in Wales must be registered with the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). They must meet the requirements of the Regulations and National Minimum Standards: Childminders, which set out expectations on all kinds of aspects of organisation, information, relationships with parents and children, including an understanding of principles and areas of learning (Welsh Government, 2016),



which, for example, include standard 7.9 requiring observation and planning for next steps in children's learning. There are no requirements to deliver a curriculum or formally assess children's learning outcomes, unless they are funded to provide early years education. To remain registered with CIW, childminders have to establish a system for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of care given to children and set out their intention to improve services each year, according to para. 16 of the Child Minding and Care Act (Wales) 2010. This is to be documented in a report. Apart from the initial inspection before registration, CIW inspections are unannounced (Care Inspectorate Wales, 20108).

The National Minimum Standards (Welsh Government, 2016) restrict the adult:child ratio to 10 children up to 12 years of age, of those no more than six may be under the age of eight years, no more than three under the age of five years, and, normally, no more than two under the age of 18 months. Children aged three to five attending full-time education provision can be classified as over five year olds. The maximum number of 10 children cannot be exceeded and includes the childminders own children as well as other children for whom she/he is responsible on their premises.

Now all three year old children in Wales have access to a minimum of 10 hours of early education. This can be either in a 'maintained' setting, which is a nursery class in a school, or a 'non-maintained' setting, which could be a playgroup, day nursery or childminder subject to Local Authority funding arrangements. The provision can be English, Welsh or bilingual. These free hours of early education are spread over four to five days a week or in blocks. The Childcare Offer for Wales enables eligible working parents to take up an additional up to 20 hours free childcare over 48 weeks a year. The maximum combined hours of free early education and childcare is 30 hours a week.

Children are adept language acquirers and therefore CC&EY services, including childminders, play an important role in supporting children in becoming bilingual (Siencyn, 2019). The establishment of Welsh speaking playgroup providers Mudiad Meithrin helped to raise the proportion of three to four year olds who can speak Welsh from 11.3 per cent in 1971 to 23.3 per cent in 2011 (Mudiad Meithrin 2016 in Waters, 2016).

Until recently there was no strategy to improve the availability of places. "In fact, the number of childcare providers in Wales and the number of childcare places relative to the population of children declined between 2008 and 2011" (Dallimore 2013 in Dallimore 2016 p. 120). A consultation on the 10-year Childcare, Play and Early Years sector resulted in the Childcare, Play and Early Years in Wales Workforce Plan (Welsh Government, 2017b), reflecting a growing interest in providing high-quality, affordable and flexible childcare to support, life-long learning, social integration and later employability, at the same time as in supporting parental, especially female, labour market participation (Dallimore, 2019). Policy initiatives, like the Childcare Offer, Business support and qualification framework for the children's care workforce in Wales reflect a shift in thinking about the responsibilities for CC&EY. From September 2019 a new qualifications framework is in place, covering levels 1-5, promoting transferability of knowledge and skills and the ability to build a career within the sector (Welsh Government, 2017b).

Table 2: Regulative framework of childminding in England and Wales

	England	Wales
Definition	People who look after one or more children they are not related to for payment or reward. The care takes place in a home that is not the child's own.	Childcare provided by one or more people for children from birth up to the age of 12 years within a domestic premises that is not the child's own home for more than 2 hours per day for reward
Registration regulation and inspection	Childminders have to be registered with Ofsted. Caring for children aged 0-5 requires to register on the Early Years Register, for children 5-7 on the Childcare Register. Alternatively, they can sign up to a Childminder Agency. Then inspections are delegated to the agency by Ofsted and Ofsted inspects agency.	Childminders have to be registered with the Care inspectorate Wales (CIW). Childminders providing childcare must meet the requirement of the National Minimum Standards. They are expected to understand the principles and areas of learning of the Foundation Phase Framework, but not to deliver it.
Curriculum	Childminders have to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	If a childminder is funded to provide early years education they would deliver the Foundation Phase Framework
Requirements	Paediatric First Aid, course, introduction course to home-based childcare, DBS check(s), health reference	Mandatory pre-registration training on home based childcare, Paediatric First Aid, course, DBS check(s), health reference
Staff child ratio, including their own	Up to 6 children under the age of 8. Up to 3 'young children' (up to 1. September following their 5 <sup>th</sup> birthday) and only 1 child under the age of 1 year. When young children attend wrap-around services and during school holidays, they can be cared for at the same time as three other young children. Ratio includes own children and other children they are responsible for, such as being fostered	10 children up to 12, of those no more than 6 under the age of 8 years, of those no more than three under the age of 5 years, of those normally no more than 1 under the age of 18 month. Ration includes own children and any other children on the premises

## Starting up

Before a childminder can take on children, they have to meet the respective requirements of registration. While an introductory course is a requirement in Wales and they are available in England, they can often be restricted by time constraints and the emphasis on 'introduction'. Childminders, like other CC&EY providers need to have accurate information as to what is required of them. However, a rolling back of the support offered by local authorities due to austerity and changes in statutory requirements means that support for childminders may not be easily accessible.

Prior to registration the childminder has to pay for the requirements of joining a register, DBS check(s), First Aid course, health declaration, training and insurance. The Department of Education (GOV.UK, 2019) estimates the following costs for childminders in England:

*Table 1: Estimated cost of registration as a childminder in England*

Childminders - caring for children of all ages	£35
Or caring only for children aged 5 or under	£35
Or caring only for children aged 5 or older	£103
DBS check, childminder and every person 16 or older in the household	£52.10
First Aid course to cover age group registering for	£60 - £200
GP to fill in and sign health declaration booklet	£90 (approx.)
Childcare training on the type of care you will provide	£50 - £200
Public liability insurance	£25 - £100 (approx..)

The English Childcare Business Grant Scheme had been available from May 2017, but closed 31. May 2019, with no stated intentions to start again in the near future. Initially available were grants of £500, which then extended to vary between £300 for new Childminders and £1000 for particular services, e.g. SEND and 30 hours free childcare.

Childminders in Wales can apply to Business Wales for a Childcare Grant (PACEY Cymru, 2018). Conditions to receive this grant include the need for additional childcare places in the locality of the provision and registration with CIW. A new Childcare Start Up Grant was opened from 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and newly registered childminders could receive up to £500 (Business Wales, 2019).

The costs and availability of business support illustrate that from the outset childminders make a number of business decisions (see [Childminding business](#)), as well as ones that relate to their own family. Private space becomes scrutinised by the public gaze of other parents and inspection by Ofsted or the Childminder Agency in England or CIW in Wales. Children may have to share the attention of their mother with other children, share their space and toys and daily routines are influenced by the requirements of the minded children and their families (Gelder, 2002, Baines et al., 2003).

One option is to join a childminder agency. The decision to be made is whether to be a childminder in their own rights, inspected by Ofsted or become a member of a Childminder Agency. In the latter case, childminders are supported and inspected by their agency. When childminder agencies were introduced childminders feared to lose their self-employed autonomy (Stephenson, 2016). This is on a regulatory level not accurate. According to regulations, childminders in Childminder Agencies

remain self-employed and able to make their own business decisions. If they cater for families making use of the free early education and care offer, the money is paid to the Childminder Agency by the local authority, who then passes it on to the childminder in question (Education & Skills Funding Agency, 2018a). Whether Childminding Agencies influence business decisions is not quite clear. For example, there may be convergence of fees charged.

## Summary

The regulation requirements in England and Wales illustrate a move to a centralised model. Where once local authorities would have inspected CC&EY services, now England and Wales have their respective inspection frameworks. The shift to a centralised model reflects a policy commitment for quality CC&EY.

The move to a common inspection framework under Ofsted (in England) and for all CC&EY providers to follow the EYFS, represents an equality manoeuvre within policy to ensure the equal treatment of providers. Arguably, the commonality offers opportunities for sharing practice across the sector and for collaborative relationships to emerge. However, inevitably, the inspection framework has been much debated across CC&EY in regards to the burden it creates for all providers (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016). One potential burden for childminders is that they are judged against the same minimum standards as other CC&EY settings, but operate under different circumstances. Childminders are typically sole operators, operating from their homes, and do not have a team to support them through an inspection process. Earlier data on the numbers exiting the registration process indicates a need to better understand it from the perspective of childminders.

## Unique Benefits of Childminding

Statistics in England and in Wales show that childminders are used by parents who need to cover care when they are at work. Historically, childminders cater almost exclusively for working parents (Harries et al., 2004, Jackson and Jackson, 1979) and this continues to be the case (Welsh Government, 2019a, Roberts and Speight, 2017). There is a small number of children who attend a childminder, because their parents require some respite or as a measure in connection to child protection. However, beyond the benefit of supporting parental employment, other benefits are in relation to the flexibility that childminders can provide and the family and community nature of childminding.

### Responsive

Childminding has the potential to offer flexible care, covering atypical hours because of the childminder's self-employed status and working on private premises. In addition to being able to respond to the needs of parents, childminders have the ability to provide care for children responding to their individual needs. Childminders are in a good position to tailor the personal experience of individual children and families, including, for example, going places (Fauth et al., 2011). Homebased childcare has developed a distinct pedagogy, different compared with other CC&EY settings (Ang et al., 2017) and may develop into family like relationships (Evans, 2013, Cousins, 2017). Children benefit from a small group of children with a wide age range and other adults in the childminder's household (Griffin and Hevey, 2018, Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

Childminders are able to offer continuity of care over a long period of time for the same family, with less vertical and horizontal transitions than other daycare settings. Some childminders perceive themselves to offer supporting services to the whole family (Evans, 2013, Gelder, 2002, Skipp and Hopwood, 2017), but this may not be acknowledged by inspections of family day care. The flexibility and stability of the care by a childminder may be especially suitable for children with Special Educational Needs (SEND) (England) or Additional Learning Needs (ALN) (Wales) and/or children 'at risk' as families may be better supported (Griffin and Hevey, 2018).

Many parents choose childminders because of the potential to develop intimate relationships and many childminders enjoy the opportunity of developing Professional Love (Page, 2010, Page, 2014, Ang and Tabu, 2018). Childminders attach high importance to 'making children feel loved' (Fauth et al., 2011). There is a delicate balance to find between fulfilling parents' wish of their child to be loved and to alleviate parents' fears that the childcare practitioner loves their child too much (Page, 2014). In the triangle of care (child, parents, childminder) intimate, positive relationships can flourish but there is also the potential for conflict and mistrust (Hohmann, 2007). Good relationships may develop into caring for each other on equal footing, reminiscent of relationships reflecting an ethic of care (Bubeck, 1995, Noddings, 1993, Dahlberg et al., 1999).

One important characteristic of childminding is the private/public link. It is a private business in a private space. However, due to regulations, the private home of the childminder becomes scrutinized by the public gaze (Gelder, 2002) and it has been found that this has a different impact on childminders with a working class background compared to those with middle class background (Jones and Osgood, 2007). Sensitive middle-class childrearing practices, in contrast to working-class approaches, are seen as beneficial and provide the blueprint for the training of home-based childcarers and are expected to be reflected in their practice (Jones and Osgood, 2007). This tension is also reflected in the objective description of childminding as childcare and the subjective representation as family like (O'Connell, 2010). The greater ease to meet the expectations of high quality childcare regarding attitudes, knowledge and resources may therefore appeal to middle-class women.

Conflicts can arise from disagreement about food, sleep, activities and how much interest the adults in this relationship express about the other's practices (Hohmann, 2007), alongside different expectations of childcare practices as derived from social class and ethnicity (Brooker, 2010). Some parents perceive the setting as too small and prefer children to encounter a larger number of children and adults (Harries et al., 2004). The characteristics of one adult working in a private space worries some parents looking for childcare. They find it difficult to develop trust and perceive the quality of childcare as low (Bell et al., 2005, Harries et al., 2004).

Many parents feel confident that childminders take good care of babies, but doubt their ability to get older children school-ready (Bell et al., 2005). Some childminders indicated that three to four year old children benefit from attending a nursery or similar (Fauth et al., 2011).

Attempts to measure the outcomes for children can result in a mixed picture and Ang et al. (2017) call for further research into the experience of children in home based settings. However, a longitudinal study on the impact of the early education use on outcomes for children concludes that overall attending any CC&EY setting benefits children and effects of "ECEC use did not differ according to family disadvantage, neighbourhood deprivation, or region. The one exception was that the beneficial effect of formal individual ECEC (i.e. childminders) use on children's emotional symptoms was statistically significant only in the moderately disadvantaged group. " (Melhuish and Gardiner, 2018, p. 38 p 38). Further, there is some evidence to suggest "the impact of childminder use on verbal development may be most influential at two to three" (Melhuish and Gardiner 2018 p61).

### In the community

Childminders' proximity to parents' home is seen as an advantage by parents, for both urban and more rural areas (Fauth et al., 2012). Childminders are rooted in the community within which children and their families live, they know people and may be important participants or organisers of community activities (Griffin and Hevey, 2018, Fauth et al., 2012). Children in the care of a childminder are more likely to be 'out and about' in the community with their childminder and may become familiar with local schools, other childcare settings, parent and toddler groups, the library and so on. For children and families in Wales, embeddedness in a Welsh speaking community may offer the opportunity to keep Welsh alive. The potential of family day care in building beneficial home, school and community partnerships is also explored in the USA which requires mutual definition of goals for children's healthy growth and learning (Freeman, 2011).

### Qualification and quality

Quality and qualifications have a strong association within CC&EY services, whereby higher levels of qualification are associated with high quality provision (Campbell-Barr, 2019). Since the 1998 Childcare Strategy, both quality and qualifications have featured prominently in initiatives for CC&EY services, all-be-it with fluctuating levels of support (Campbell-Barr, 2015).

#### England

As stated earlier, at the time of writing, childminders are only required to have minimal introductory training in order to register. The Nutbrown Review (Nutbrown, 2012) called for all CC&EY workers to have a minimum qualification of a Level Three. The review acknowledged that childminding was distinct in the CC&EY sector and that a move from introductory training to a Level Three could place a burden on childminders, but it would ensure there was parity across the sector. Although the

recommendations of the Nutbrown review were not implemented<sup>10</sup>, there is evidence that the CC&EY sector, including childminders, are often obtaining higher qualifications than minimum requirements stipulate (Bonetti, 2018).

A comparison of research in the 1990s (Moss and Penn, 1996, Gelder, 2002) and more recent surveys shows that fewer childminders have no qualifications and more hold qualifications at least to Level 3 (Simon et al., 2016) and a large proportion hold a childcare related qualification. Data from the Childcare and Early Years Survey (Department for Education, 2018b) shows that 69 per cent of childminders held a Level 3 qualification and nine per cent were educated to degree level. The higher than required levels of qualifications can be seen as an indication of a commitment to childminding as a profession.

Childminders' viewing themselves as professionals is linked to the qualifications they hold, their experience as parents and the length of time worked as a childminder (Otero and Melhuish, 2015, Gelder, 2002). Since the late 1990s, there have been a number of initiatives to support the CC&EY workforce to upskill and develop their professionalism (Georgeson and Payler, 2014). While arguably positioning the experience and expertise of the sector within a deficit model, the introduction of degree level qualifications has largely been welcomed by the CC&EY sector. The British (England) government introduced the EYPS in 2007, and courses required a BA degree and assessment in early years settings. The Early Years Initial Teacher Status (EYITT) superseded the EYPS, but it should be acknowledged that there is much debate about both the EYPS and EYITT and how they are seen in terms of status. In particular, although both qualifications are of degree level, bringing parity with those who work in the Maintained sector, the remuneration and status of the degrees does not have the same parity (Georgeson and Payler, 2014, Campbell-Barr, 2019, Osgood, 2012). This is despite evidence that achieving Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) has had a positive impact on quality and consequent Ofsted inspections. The proportion of childminders and settings rated as outstanding increased when practitioners had achieved EYPS (Davis and Capes, 2013).

The numbers of childminders is declining but the quality as judged by Ofsted inspections is improving (Stephenson, 2016). In 2018 the proportion of childminders judged as 'outstanding' or 'good' at the most recent inspection had increased from 78 per cent to 95 per cent compared to five years earlier (Office for Standards in Education, 2019a, Office for Standards in Education, 2015). More experience as a childminder was linked to a greater likelihood to be judged to be 'outstanding' by the Ofsted inspection, as did training, experience in working in Early Years services and being a parent (Evans, 2013).

### *Wales*

The government of Wales announced in 2017 ambitious plans to develop a high-skilled childcare workforce, by setting up a new suite of qualifications for the sector from September 2019, including plans to establish career pathways for childminders (Welsh Government, 2017a). The new qualification framework is now in place.

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<sup>10</sup> An [Early Years Workforce Strategy](#) has been developed, but has not taken on many of the recommendations of the Nutbrown Review.

## Summary

The characteristics of childminding illustrate that childminders hold a unique position within CC&EY provision in relation to their pedagogical approach and their potential for flexibility in how they offer services. The pedagogical approach is arguably one that is more family orientated and embedded within the community, while offering the opportunity for responsiveness to both parents and children. Although it should be noted that other CC&EY providers may lay claim to the same attributes, the bringing together of the private and public is something that appears unique to childminders.

Childminders have demonstrated a commitment to gaining higher levels of training than minimum requirements state. However, as with other areas of the CC&EY sector, there are issues around the professional status of childminding. While professionalism is much debated within the CC&EY community, there is a suggestion that childminders are somewhat distinct, but what is less evident is whether they construct their professional identity differently to the rest of the sector.



## Threats to Childminding

The CC&EY sector has seen rapid change in the last 25 years that have consequences for how childminding (and other EY&CC services) are perceived. Griffin and Hevey (2018) divide reasons for undervaluing and underusing childminders along historical, ideological and psychological factors, influencing “parents’ and society’s view on nature and quality childminding”. Historically childminding had a ‘bad press’, brought to light by Jackson and Jackson (1979). Their action research project led to further regulation, the founding of the National Childminding Agency and support to improve quality, especially on the insistence by the National Childminding Agency (NCMA – now PACEY), but this developed slowly. The National Childcare Strategy (Department for Education and Employment, 1998), came nearly 20 years after the Jackson and Jackson’s research, and envisaged a rapid expansion of childminding and improvements in quality, supported by networks (with a coordinator). *Children Come First*, (National Childminding Association, 1998) the childminder network scheme and the accreditation to offer nursery education contributed to improve the status of childminders. Important milestones were Ofsted (in England) taking on inspections 2001, with ratings in line with other CC&EY providers, and the requirement to take part in 12 hours of training and a paediatric first aid course.

However, despite the moves towards developing the childminding sector, the decline of childminders means this form of childcare provision is less visible in communities. Unlike group care providers they are less noticeable in their community and have no ‘shop front’ other than information about them provided by their local authority, usually allowing to search for childcare providers online. In England, there appear to be less parent and toddler groups and a decline of Children’s Centres and sessions for parents and childminders (Smith et al., 2018), and with it less opportunities to meet a childminder. Parents may not be aware that they can access the free 15/30 hours early education and childcare at a childminder. Just under half of the parents responding to the *Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents in England, 2018* (Department for Education, 2018a) were not aware about details of the 30 hour offer, e.g. splitting between providers and taking hours across the whole year, and just under a quarter did not know that they are eligible when using a childminder. Griffin and Hevey (2018) claim that parents are not informed about childminders’ ability to offer funded places by Local Authorities, health visitors and children’s centres, which is linked to less support for childminders and the drastic decline of childminder networks. They also see a problem in that the unemployed are only eligible for 15 hours free childcare. Parents, especially on lower incomes are not aware of 30 hours free childcare in general, and only 67 per cent on a ‘modest’ income were aware (Social Mobility Commission, 2019).

The stronger emphasis of very young children’s need for early education in combination with the perception of childminding as more caring (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) may influence parents’ choice. Yet, assuming lower quality (i.e. lower qualification) of childminders in contrast to other settings, and not as educational, ignores the wish of many parents who prefer a home-like setting (Fauth et al., 2012, Griffin and Hevey, 2018). Nevertheless, some parents may find the close relationship, which they describe as ‘mummy-like’, threatening (Page 2011) and can become concerned when hand-over time is difficult (Griffin and Hevey, 2018).

## Giving up childminding

Childminders with children on their rolls usually intend to continue, at least for the near future (Fauth et al., 2011, Barker, 2012). Research with rural childminders showed that they appear to stay longer in this kind of self-employment, especially those in England who had been rated by Ofsted as ‘outstanding’ (Evans, 2013). The reasons to give up childminding are complex and interwoven (PACEY Cymru, 2017), including issues of business sustainability, policy context and personal circumstances.

Contributing to the decision of giving up is how satisfied in general childminders are with their work. In general childminders are satisfied with their work and cherish especially their work with children. Because childminding takes place in the private family home, other family members shape the practice of childminding. Once their own children grow older, there is a potential that they grow into 'assistants' and a little later may develop into a childminder team. There are mother and daughter teams and a number of husbands (Gelder, 2002, Baines et al., 2003) and some husbands or partners were registered, often with the purpose to act as backup and help out with school runs (Gelder, 2002). It is also possible that older children begin to resent the restrictions, for example, to be quiet when younger children sleep, their mother being tied to the minded children and having to share toys and space (Baines et al., 2003).

Barker (2012) reports that 16 per cent of her sample of childminders were dissatisfied with their role, a higher proportion than Mooney et al. (2001a) reported. Measures to improve the quality of childminding and to put this form of CC&EY on a more equal footing with other services appears to result into reasons of dissatisfaction with some aspects of childminding. Childminders find Ofsted inspections and connected requirements most stressful (Crosland, 2016, Graven, 2019). Some feel that aspects of the high quality of their practice are not recognised and that the inspection is paper driven (Evans, 2013). Shortly after the EYFS was introduced in England and the delivery of it made mandatory for childminders, the perceived amount of paperwork required and the time necessary to fulfil all requirements were seen as most challenging (Fauth et al., 2011). Before the introduction of the EYFS, paperwork was not mentioned by childminders as a reason of dissatisfaction (Mooney et al., 2001b). Stephenson (2016) points out that it is about the perception of the increasing amount of paperwork, even if that is not born out by expectations from Ofsted. Anticipated changes to the inspection framework, as announced by Amanda Spielman, the head of Ofsted from September 2019, also unsettles childminders (Graven, 2019). Small scale research with former childminders in London showed that the reasons to give up were isolation, perception of paperwork and the lack of support from the local authority and/or Ofsted (Shorto and Landes, 2017).

The introduction of Funded Early Years Education impacts on the complex patterns to fill places and make childminding a viable business. What funding is available, how to apply for this, the short-fall and misconceptions, make childminding less attractive (Skipp and Hopwood, 2017). Childminding was chosen by many as an opportunity to combine their own childcare commitments with the opportunity to earn some money. The possibility to generate income are limited, working conditions are insecure and the opportunity to expand limited by the regulative framework of the EYFS and the different requirements by parents. Once their own children are older or it becomes financially feasible to access childcare for themselves, they may seek other, better paid employment (PACEY Cymru, 2017, Mooney et al., 2001b).

Many childminders move into other CC&EY related positions (Mooney et al., 2001b). This is also reflected in further research. When asked what they would like to do if they were to leave childminding, 44 per cent say they would like to have another job with children (Statham et al., 2008). A small scale study in California showed that some childminders who provided care for a larger number of children aimed to open up a childcare centre (Tonyan and Nuttall, 2014). While there is the potential to see childminding as part of a wider network of CC&EY employment pathways, the continuity of care for children has to be considered (Statham et al., 2008).

## Childminding as a business

Childminders are 'confined' to the location they live, which then requires demand in that area, either because parents live or work there. However, the demand from parents is not solely a case of supply numerically matching demand. As has been discussed, parents will balance working hours, informal care, other services used for their children, (e.g. pre-school, schools), commuting distances and informal care (Bell et al., 2005, Harries et al., 2004). Parents' choice is also influenced if the setting and the staff express similar values and 'feel right' (Bell et al., 2005).

Childminders base their decision on their charges on the common rate in the area and what they believe parents can afford. Less business orientated childminders may not increase fees over time, because they are embarrassed to talk about money (Ferri, 1992, Gelder, 2002, Harries et al., 2004). Agreeing rates and terms of payment, being late collecting or bringing children or late payment of fees have been reported by childminders to cause tensions (Fauth et al., 2011). More business orientated childminders include in their decision about fees the possible financial support parents can receive and ask in this case for higher fees, since parents receive financial help for childcare. These childminders market themselves with the kind of environment and professional experience they could offer to children and families (Harries et al., 2004).

The feasibility of childminding as a business depends on how many places a childminder can or wants to offer, the hours catered for, decisions on fees, extras and expenses and whether there is a demand for the places on offer. The number and ages of her own children impact on the places that can be offered. As discussed earlier, childminders may emphasise their provision as care and may leave more educational provision to others in the sector. This may leave them providing care that wraps around provision in nurseries, nursery schools and schools. When childminders take and/or collect children from other CC&EY providers, they may be limited by where they can take children to or pick up from (Bell et al., 2005). When parents prefer to use informal care by family and friends, childminders may fill gaps. This resulting fragmentation may leave vacant places that cannot be filled due to regulations setting out how many children of which ages can be in the care of a childminder at any one time (Gelder, 2002, Mooney et al., 2001a). The task of having to transport to and from other providers, having to provide meals and out-of-hours services and complicated hours when working alongside other providers that are only available during term time, and therefore demand a different pattern during holidays (Skipp and Hopwood, 2017), may explain why it is so difficult to work to full capacity. In England, 68 per cent of childminders reported vacancies which indicated 42 per cent of registered full-day provision places were not filled (Department for Education, 2018b).

A high proportion of childminders make additional charges for meals, snacks, nappies and outings, etc. in England (Speight et al., 2019), which may be related to the low rates received from the government to reimburse for the free early education and childcare entitlements (Skipp and Hopwood, 2017). However, there is the danger of pricing themselves out of the market and, combined with a dislike to discuss money and business arrangements, many childminders risk a lack of financial security.

In 2018 mean unit costs (costs per hour and child) of £3.42 were lower in childminder settings compared to all other CC&EY settings, as are a mean hourly staff income of £7.46 (Cattoretti et al., 2019). Seventy per cent of childminders paid themselves or drew money from the business implicitly less or below the National Living Wage (Cattoretti et al., 2019). Qualification level had no impact on hourly income, in contrast to other settings. Compared with other CC&EY settings, childminders had the highest proportion of being in deficit with 34 per cent, nearly half with 47 per cent were breaking even and only 19 per cent made a surplus (Cattoretti et al., 2019).

In comparison to centre based CC&EY services, childminders ask for lower fees (Colman and Cottell, 2019), see Table 4. The averages set out in Table 4 do not reflect existing big variations between regions in England. According to Colman and Cottell (2019) they are the outcome of private providers being able to set their fees in a competitive market place and that there are some parents who are willing and able to spend considerably more than the average for childcare. The situation in Wales is more complex, since there are different systems in place for supporting parents. A meaningful calculation of the costs of childcare for three to four year old children is not possible (Colman and Cottell, 2019).

*Table 2: Average costs for 25 hours childcare in England and Wales, 2019*

	Nursery		Childminder	
	Under two	two	Under two	two
England	£128.98	£125.77	£114.37	£112.92
Wales	£117.36	£116.19	£105.70	£105.70

Once parents are eligible to receive funding for three to four year old children, the weekly costs for a 25 hour place reduced to £49.23 and that of a 50 hours place to £95.84 in England.

The business situation for childminders becomes more complex when parents are eligible for free early education and childcare (see [Definition, regulation and policy](#)). Parents have to sign up to a childcare account in order to benefit from the subsidy for early education and childcare. The childcare provider has to sign up to a childcare provider account for the Tax Free Childcare (TFC) scheme and can then receive payment by parents and the refund for early education and childcare for the 15 or 30 hours free to parents. Initially there are different rates of funded education entitlement in England (Skipp and Hopwood, 2017, Department for Education, 2018c) and childminders received on average lower rates than other CC&EY providers in their local authority. Now local authorities have to apply a formula to set a universal rate for all providers (Education & Skills Funding Agency, 2018a). For the period 2019 to 2020 the hourly rate ranged from £4.30 to £8.51, with a median of £4.49 and a mean of £4.86 (Education & Skills Funding Agency, 2018b). To be paid this grant termly and not monthly is problematic for childminders (Graven, 2019).

Speight et al. (2019) show complex links between the free hours offers (two year olds and three to four year olds) and other procedures, like signing up to the Tax Free Childcare (TFC) offer. Providers offering the 15 hours free early education also offered extended hours. Seventy-seven per cent of childminders offered extended hours, a smaller proportion than other settings, but a higher proportion, 19 per cent, reported that this offer of extended hours had not been taken up. A small proportion of childminders, 4 per cent, provided the 30 hours childcare only. Those providers, including childminders, who had signed up for TFC were more likely to offer funded hours for two year olds. It appears that childminders working in a region with a large proportion of other CC&EY services offering free hours were less likely to offer extended hours. This may be linked to misinformation and being unaware that the grant can be split between providers (Skipp and Hopwood, 2017, Education & Skills Funding Agency, 2018a).

At the time of writing, Welsh childminders received a pilot rate of £4.50 an hour for the childcare element of the 30 hours childcare offer. All three to four year old children in Wales have access to a minimum of 10 hours free early education through the Foundation Phase Curriculum during term time (39 weeks per annum) and working parents can receive additional hours delivered by a regulated childcare provider of funded childcare up to 30 hours a week for 48 weeks a year. Foundation Phase

Nursery provision cannot be swapped for childcare hours. Early adopter local authorities are expected to set up funding mechanisms to pay childcare providers monthly in advance (Welsh Government, 2018a).

The Welsh government set out clear guidance on the £4.50 per hour childcare element and the maximum amount of money that can be charged for food and snacks. Childcare providers can charge for occurring costs for transport and outings (PACEY Cymru, 2019).

The business opportunities for childminders in Wales is influenced by other CC&EY providers. Children from certain disadvantaged areas have access to 'Flying Start', which includes 2.5 hours of childcare provision that can be accessed in a childminding setting, playgroup or day nursery provider depending on local funding arrangements. Just over 20 per cent of Welsh two year olds take part in Flying Start' (Dallimore, 2016). Not all of these children are from economically disadvantaged families, because the Flying Start offer is an area based provision. Most children in Wales are in schools part-time when they are three (Dallimore, 2016). Another influence on the demand of individual childminders may be their ability to speak Welsh and whether parents wish that their child is cared for in a bi-lingual or only Welsh or English environment (Dallimore, 2016).

More secure working conditions may be established when another organisation, like the NHS may secure places at childminders for their staff (Harries et al., 2004). Usually childminders rely on the information published by their local authority and word of mouth to fill places. Harries et al. (2004) report that some childminders were on the list of an agency, recruiting childminders for professionals.

### Working conditions

The childminder is responsible for a number of quite different aspects of work. The core of this form of self-employment is the work with children and this is the aspect childminders like best (Gelder, 2002, Mooney et al., 2001a, PACEY Cymru, 2017), but the role also requires some business skills, including paperwork, IT skills and the ability to negotiate business aspects with parents. To sell childcare runs counter to the general perception of care as selfless and in need of protection from commodification (for further discussion see Gelder, 2002). Further, in order to meet requirements childminders have to be [inspected on a regular basis](#). Ofsted inspections are experienced as very stressful by childminders (Crosland, 2016), providing another dynamic to their working conditions.

Childminding can be experienced as isolating and invite feelings of loneliness. This is exacerbated when childminders do not know about the support that is out there, e.g. on-line forums but also childminding support groups established by childminders themselves (Webster, 2017). Some childminders have close-knit support networks of other childminders (Ang and Tabu, 2018). To have access to a childminder network, meeting other childminders during CPD sessions and opportunities to meet up in Children Centres can benefit childminders and their retention. This kind of support is more difficult to organise in rural areas (Evans, 2013) and the decline of childminders will make it more difficult to find other childminders in a workable proximity. Meeting facilities for childminders and their children in Children Centres (Hall et al., 2015) may be the victim of the steep decline in Children Centres and the cut of services they offer (Smith et al., 2018). However, groups can also contribute to confusion and misinformation (Skipp and Hopwood, 2017).

Training opportunities, too, can mitigate against feelings of isolation (Barker, 2012). Yet, they may be difficult to access due to distance, travel expenses and the time they are offered (Faulkner and Coates, 2013), especially in rural areas (Evans, 2013). Sessions during the day create problems of how to fulfil their caring commitments to the minded children. When training is offered in the evening,

childminders may find it difficult to find care for their own children. Although childminding support groups can be costly and difficult to organise they can help to disseminate good practice and organise CPD (Webster, 2017).

The support available from local authorities varies ranging from providing network opportunities, training and advice to not being available (Evans, 2013, Skipp and Hopwood, 2017). Some of the services had stopped due to funding cuts. Researchers in the USA proposed a model of home visits to support family day care providers, with the aim to improve quality, addressing isolation and lack of resources and training, and facing the challenges of running a business while caring for children (Bromer and Korfmacher, 2017).

The internet gains momentum as another support forum. However, childminders working in rural areas may be excluded because broadband connections are slow or non-existent (Evans, 2013) and there is a danger of confusion and misinformation (Skipp and Hopwood, 2017).

### Demographic context

Beyond the working conditions of childminding and childminding as a business, a further threat to childminding are changes to the demographic context. Since the 1970s important demographic changes took place, including that there are now less children born in England and Wales. Overall, individual women have fewer children over their lifetime. This may be due to a number of reasons. One of them is that they may postpone childbearing. Women between the age of 30 to 34 have the highest Total Fertility rate (Office for National Statistics, 2019b). At the same time mothers' employment rates increased by 11.8 per cent over the past 20 years. Mothers with dependent children are more likely to work part-time. Mothers with a youngest child aged two to three have the lowest employment rates (65.1 per cent) and of these women 57 per cent work part-time. Single mothers are more likely to be unemployed in comparison to coupled mothers, especially of very young children. However, when children get older, single mothers are more likely to be in full-time employment than mothers living in a couple (Office for National Statistics, 2017). The demographic context has consequences for the rate of demand for CC&EY places.

### Summary

The threats to childminding are far reaching, from personal circumstances and changes in family life to operating a business and challenging working conditions. Explorations of the working conditions of childminders illustrates how many of the structural changes in and around CC&EY policy and provision are having a knock on effect on what it means to be a childminder. While there is broadly more support for the CC&EY sector as a whole, the evolution of a range of different funding mechanisms and regulatory requirements has created a complex dynamic within the CC&EY sector, particularly for childminders. The confusion around which funding streams childminders can access (all-be-it by proxy of parents) is arguably symbolic of a wider confusion as to how childminders are positioned within CC&EY – a service to support other CC&EY providers or a quality, professional service in its own right.

Inevitably there will be different and personal motivations for entering (and leaving) childminding. However, the potential for isolation when working as a childminder risks not only childminders having a lack of opportunities to access support, but also to have joint conversations on the role of childminding and to share knowledge on how to be operate effectively as a childminder. Stories of sustainability and negotiating with parents are common, but do not seem to have been shared and

addressed. Thus childminding is faced with a dual challenge of how it constructs its own professional status and how this is positioned in relation to the wider CC&EY sector.

## Appendix Two: Policy Changes

### Key policies and legislation changes in Wales

2006	The Childcare Act 2006
2008	The Childcare Act 2006 (Local Authority Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2008 Rheoliadau Deddf Gofal Plant 2006(Asesiadau Awdurdodau Lleol) (Cymru) 2008
2010	Child Minding and Day Care Regulations
2010	Children and Families Wales Measure
2011	Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure
2013	School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 Deddf Safonau a Threfniadaeth Ysgolion (Cymru) 2013
2014	Children and Families Act 2014 (UK)
2014	Social Services and Well-being Act
2016	Regulation and Inspection of Social Care Act
2016	CSSIW New Inspection Framework. The upper age limit for the registration of childcare provision will be extended from 8 to 12 years.
2015-16	Welfare Reform and Work
2016	The Childcare Act 2006 Regulations 2016 Rheoliadau Deddf Gofal Plant 2006 (Asesiadau Awdurdodau Lleol) (Cymru) 2016
2017	The Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2017 Rheoliadau Addysg (Cymorth i Fyfyryr) (Cymru) 2017
2019	Childcare Funding Deddf Cyllido Gofal Plant (Cymru) 2019
2019 consultation	Draft Code of Practice for inspection of Child Minding, Day Care and Open Access Play Services
2019	The Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (Consequential Amendments to Secondary Legislation) Regulations 2019 Rheoliadau Deddf Rheoleiddio ac Arolygu Gofal Cymdeithasol (Cymru) 2016 (Diwygiadau Canlyniadol i Is-ddeddfwriaeth) 2019



## Key policies and legislation changes in England

Year	Event
1991	Under the Children Act 1989 the responsibility for day care services was transferred from the Department of Health (DoH) to the Department for Education (DfE)
1995	DfE becomes Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)
2001	DfEE becomes Department for Education and Skills (DfES)
2001	Responsibility for regulation of childcare provision was transferred from Local Authority Social Services Departments to a national agency, the Early Years Directorate of OFSTED
2001	National standards for early years providers, including childminders, were introduced, including a framework of regulation that is both national and part of the education system
2002	Education Act
2003	Every Child Matters policy initiative introduced
2005	Education Act
2006	Childcare Act, 2006
2008	DfES becomes Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)
2008	Early Years Foundation Stage is implemented
2010	DCSF becomes the Department for Education
2011	Education Act
2012	Health and Social Care Act
2010 -2015	Coalition government policy on childcare and early education
2014	Children and Families Act
2014	Statutory framework for EYFS
2014	Childcare Payments Act
2016	Childcare Act
2017	Children and Social Work Act 2017
2017	Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Act 2017
2019	The Children's Homes etc. Inspection Fees, Childcare Fees, Adoption and Children Act Register (Amendment) Regulations 2019

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