



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

RESEARCH

Registration of the Childcare, Play and Early Years workforce in Wales: independent review (summary)

The review informs actions and next steps for the professional registration of the Childcare, Play and Early Years (CPEY) workforce.

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Research aims and methodology

The aim of this research was to provide an independent review of the childcare, play and early years (CPEY) workforce in Wales, and to inform actions and next steps for introducing a CPEY workforce registry. The study addressed the following research questions.

- Who makes up the CPEY workforce in Wales? What are their job roles and in which setting type do they work?
- How are CPEY workers classified and regarded? Are parts of the workforce already registered with existing registries and/or through professional bodies? Are CPEY workers considered as part of the education sector, the care sector, or other sectors?
- In the case of a new registry being set up by the Welsh government, should all CPEY workers be registered? If not, are there specific subgroups that should be registered?
- What are the experiences of other Administrations in registering the childcare and play or related workforces? What lessons can we learn from them and apply to the Welsh context?
- What are the potential options, timelines and any identifiable financial costs for moving forward?

A range of methods were used including desk-based research, semi-structured interviews and a stakeholder engagement workshop.

Desk-based research was conducted to obtain a landscape view of the CPEY workforce in Wales. Case studies of early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce registries in other countries focused on those that already had workforce registries (Scotland, the United States) and those with similar ECEC systems also exploring the potential of a workforce registry (Australia).

Eleven group interviews were conducted with CPEY stakeholders in Wales, two

were conducted with organisations responsible for the early years workforce registry in Scotland and one was conducted with those exploring a workforce registry in Australia.

The final stage of the project involved further engagement with stakeholders through a two-hour workshop, with the aim of identifying areas of consensus and of divergence among stakeholders, and from these to draw final conclusions and recommendations for the Welsh Government on how to best move forward with the creation of a workforce registry. After being presented with initial findings from the desk-based research and interviews, workshop participants were split into groups to discuss key issues which had been identified through the interviews as requiring further discussion to bring different perspectives together for consensus building. Each group summarised areas of agreement, issues for further consideration and ideas for next steps, giving each group a chance to feedback

Main findings

Defining the CPEY workforce and who should be included in the registry

The desk-based research highlighted the difficulty with estimating the size of the CPEY workforce, particularly some groups such as playworkers, seasonal workers, people holding dual roles and staff employed in unregistered settings.

In the stakeholder interviews and engagement workshop participants acknowledged that the CPEY workforce is diverse, and includes people working in many different types of settings and many roles. While there was agreement among participants that the sector should be seen as a whole, there was not full consensus on who to include in a workforce registry and how.

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There was clear consensus from participants on the inclusion (or not) of some groups. Professionals working in day care settings should be included in the register, whereas there was little interest in registering nannies. The groups identified as being less straightforward to include in a workforce registry were: playworkers (who are themselves a diverse group, and include seasonal workers, volunteers and those working in unregistered settings); childminders (who are already registered as a setting with Care Inspectorate Wales); and workers in unregistered settings (who by nature of not being registered we have little information about).

In the workshop and interviews participants shared initial ideas for how to include more complicated categories of workers in the registry, such as starting the registration process with workers who are registered with Care Inspectorate Wales, before moving on to other groups, or taking a phased approach, as has been the case in social care, focussing on one role at a time, for example, managers to be registered first, before moving on to register frontline workers.

Practical elements of a registry

Interview and workshop participants emphasised the importance of the question of where the registry should sit and who should have responsibility for it. Key to this question is how workers' roles are conceptualised: participants described how some workers fit within education, others within care, but for some roles it is less clear. Playworkers are an example of a group that do not fit clearly within either education or care. A number of suggestions were discussed within the interviews but there was no clear agreement on who should have the responsibility for the registry, though there were concerns about marginalising parts of the workforce if the registry sat with an organisation where some parts of the workforce did not fit within their remit.

In both the interviews and workshop there was a broad consensus that registration should be mandatory.

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Interview and workshop participants were concerned that fee-based registration would be an additional burden and a barrier to recruitment, especially for a low paid workforce. However, some participants also recognised that there could be some benefits to charging registration fees, including workers being more likely to seek out the benefits of the registry and potentially the registry being a mechanism for better contact with workers. There was clear agreement that if any registration fee were charged, it should be low enough to ensure it is manageable. Participants emphasised the importance of clearly communicating what the benefits of the registry are to justify any fee that is charged as well as the registration process overall.

Qualifications and continuous professional development

Interview and workshop participants agreed that it is important that qualifications do not present a barrier to registration and working in the CPEY sector. Participants suggested that allowing a grace period to achieve qualifications (as in Scotland) would help prevent qualifications becoming a barrier. Another suggestion was to take a 'confirmed competence' approach, whereby for more experienced workers experience is recognised as proof of competence.

Interview and workshop participants recognised that one of the potential benefits of a registry is the opportunity to support workers' upskilling and continuing professional development (CPD). This support could take a number of forms. At its simplest level, the registry could be used as a tool for logging and keeping track of CPD hours, which would benefit both employees and employers. At a more advanced level, the registry could facilitate access to CPD directly and lead to a more efficient provision of CPD by matching supply and demand.

On the whole participants agreed with the benefits of CPD hours being made a requirement to maintain registration, but highlighted the need to ensure CPD is accessible to workers across the CPEY workforce as there are currently unequal opportunities. Making CPD accessible includes ensuring that workers are given

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the time needed for CPD as well as removing financial barriers.

Conclusions and recommendations

Interviews and a stakeholder engagement workshop showed that there is overall agreement in principle with the establishment of a CPEY workforce registry, though there are important elements of a registry that need to be resolved for the potential benefits to materialise. Based on the findings outlined above, the following recommendations are proposed for consideration by the Welsh Government:

Before the set-up stage

The Welsh Government should set up a working group tasked with the following:

- Work with the sector to develop robust options for who should be responsible for setting up and maintaining the registry, considering whether it should be under the remit of Social Care Wales, the Education Workforce Council or a different body
- Work with the sector to develop robust options for which group(s) of the workforce should be registered and how, considering the option of taking a phased approach, whereby registration starts with one group of workers. Such phased approach could include recommendations on the following details:
 - The registration process could proceed by group of workers, starting with a group for which there is full agreement about their participation such as childcare workers in registered settings
 - The registration process could start with workers in managerial roles before moving to frontline workers
 - A clear timeline should be created and published for other groups to join

once the initial set-up phase is completed and clear actions for how to handle issues specific to each group have been taken

- Recommend what elements of the workforce should be part of the registration, considering the following options: qualifications, CPD activities/hours, employment history/experience, or all of these

The Welsh Government should formally consult with the sector and public more generally on the elements of the registry considered by the working group

Once the consultation is complete, the Welsh Government should:

- consider feedback and where appropriate refine proposals
- continue sector engagement activities to make sure the purpose of the registry is clearly communicated. Such activities could include newsletters, social media campaigns, workshops and regional seminars
- consider the right name for the registry to ensure the language signals the true function
- organise a 'get ready' campaign, i.e. an information campaign aimed at making the CPEY workforce aware of the details and timeline of the registration

The Welsh Government should decide on matters related to registration fees and timings deciding whether registration should be free or fee-based, and in the latter case whether fees should be dependent on the role and if registration should be annual, periodic or ongoing

The Welsh Government should make clear plans as to how to link qualifications and Continuing Professional Development to the registry. In particular, the Welsh Government should:

- ensure that qualifications are not a barrier to enter the sector
- work with sector bodies to understand the CPD offer both in terms of the existing offer as well as in terms of what counts as quality CPD

- assess whether additional funding is required both to remove the financial barrier to CPD for individuals and help settings release staff for training

During launch stage and first year of registry operation

The Welsh Government should continue to consult the sector, for example through surveys or focus groups of the first group that is registered to evaluate the functioning of the registry and understand if anything needs to be changed before other segments of the workforce are added.

The Welsh Government should organise a consultation process before the other groups are added.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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