

National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare (for children up to 12 years of age) Review

Integrated Impact Assessment (including Children's and Welsh Language impact assessments)

Background

The [National Minimum Standards \(NMS\) for Regulated Childcare for children up to 12 years](#) helps support registered providers in meeting the regulatory requirements associated with their provision under the [Childminding and Daycare \(Wales\) Regulations 2010](#) (as amended). The NMS requires that all registered persons must have regard to the NMS and meet regulatory requirements. The regulatory body responsible for ensuring that the standards are met is the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

NMS review 2024 - 2025

We are committed to reviewing the NMS on a regular basis so that it remains fit for purpose. It is important to note that the NMS already contains requirements and standards that providers must meet in relation to children's rights, equal opportunities and language choice of relevant children in their care. Standards relating to these key areas are updated regularly as part of the NMS review process.

The overriding focus of the NMS review is to ensure the ongoing safety and wellbeing of the children being cared for and to support the sustainability of the childcare and playwork sector. Our aims for this review are to develop:

- Standards to support high quality play, learning and care provision.
- Standards which provide reassurance to parents that provision meets children's needs and their wellbeing.
- Standards to equip providers to meet relevant regulations.
- Standards aligned to Early Childhood Play Learning and Care (ECPLC) principles setting out conditions for high quality childcare and play.
- Proportionate standards

The NMS was last refreshed in 2023 following a review and consultation exercise. Several changes were made to the NMS in response to 20 recommendations from the [NMS review report](#) published in 2019.

This current review considered findings and specific recommendations from the following: [NMS review in 2019](#); [The Independent review of Child minding](#); [The Ministerial Review of Play](#).

Proposal development

To meet the aims of this NMS review, develop robust proposals and provide opportunities to raise concerns, an NMS Advisory Group and working groups were set up to work with Welsh Government. The groups included stakeholders from across the sector who have

been fully involved in the development of the consultation proposals including assessing the impact on service users and providers.

Our Advisory Group and working groups represent the interests of childcare and playwork in Wales. They include the Cwlwm consortium¹, Care Inspectorate Wales, Play Wales, local authority childcare and play teams and other organisations.

Our collaboration work highlighted other emerging issues that caused barriers for the sector which were included in the consultation proposals e.g., Standard 11: Medication and Standard 13 (DC): Suitable Person (Day care) specifically the deployment of staff in Day care.

The NMS review has been carried out in conjunction with other Early Years Childcare and Play reviews of the Exceptions Order and the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment to ensure alignment and integration. Working in this way allows us to consider the issues systemically and understand any wider impacts.

Pre-consultation engagement

Providers:

Workshops with Play Wales and the Cwlwm consortium in 2024/2025 found that the National Minimum Standards (NMS) are generally seen as fit for purpose, user-friendly, and reassuring for both providers and parents. Providers often exceed the minimum requirements, positively impacting children. Suggestions for improvement included better alignment with Early Childhood, Play Learning and Care (ECPLC) resources, regular reviews to keep standards current, proportionate standards for open access playwork, and making the NMS more accessible online.

Parents and Children:

Focus groups with Children in Wales explored what matters most in childcare:

- Parents prioritised accessibility, inclusivity, safety, affordability, and well-trained staff. They highlighted barriers such as high costs, limited availability, and insufficient support for children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Families from ethnic minorities wanted more cultural and religious consideration. Many parents found it difficult to distinguish between registered and unregistered childcare.
- Children expressed that play, socialising, and supportive staff were key contributors to their wellbeing and enjoyment in childcare settings. While some younger children missed their families or disliked certain activities, most described their experiences as positive and enjoyable. Across all ages, children valued the variety of activities and engaging environments, and highlighted the importance of fun, safety, and inclusivity. They also called for ongoing improvements in fairness and safety,

¹ [Cwlwm consortium](#) represent the interests of childcare providers in Wales who are [National Day Nurseries Association](#); [Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Club](#), [Coram Pacey Cymru](#); [Early Years Wales](#)

emphasising that nurturing, inclusive settings are top priorities for their overall experience.

Feedback from engagement highlighted the vital role of childcare and play settings in balancing fun, learning, and safety, supporting families, and promoting children's holistic development. The engagement provided valuable insights for future reviews and improvements.

Consultation

The consultation considered proposals to change elements of the NMS. The consultation was shared widely with all registered childcare providers and stakeholders. Childcare umbrella organisations played an active role in shaping the proposals and disseminating the consultation to their members. Communication efforts encompassed focus groups, targeted social media posts, and newsletter articles, all aimed at fostering engagement and encouraging feedback on the consultation process.

The proposals were subject to a 12-week consultation from 17 September to 10 December 2025. Views were welcomed from family-facing organisations and those which represent the interests of children in Wales.

The following parts of the NMS were consulted upon:

1. Structure and layout of the National Minimum Standards

In response to recommendations made in the NMS review 2019, we consulted on a draft mock up example of one of the standards (Standard 12 Food and Drink) to show how the NMS could be presented on www.gov.wales to improve structure, layout and user experience.

2. High Quality provision – update to the *What do we mean by High Quality provision* Chapter?

As part of the longer-term vision for Early Childhood Play Learning and Care (ECPLC), a proposal to update the introduction chapter in the NMS - "*What do we mean by High Quality Provision*", was included to further strengthen information and requirements with regards to quality, helping to embed a children's rights approach to policy making

3. Definition of Open Access Playwork

The Ministerial Review of Play Report (MRoP recommendation 11.3 asked the Welsh Government to 'Review and update the definition of open access playwork and the settings where it takes place and make relevant revisions to the NMS. The updated definition (below) of open access playwork was developed and consulted on.

Staffed playwork provision is appropriate for children of all ages.

For regulatory purposes, staffed Open Access playwork provision is for children aged 5 to 12 years. It can be permanent or temporary provision, located in a variety of settings with or without premises, as defined in 'Wales – a Play friendly country' statutory guidance [Wales: a play friendly country | GOV.WALES](#). There is no prior arrangement between the parent/carer and the registered person to provide childcare. Children are not

required to be escorted by a parent or other responsible person to and from the relevant premises. Children are not restricted in their movements, other than where related to safety matters.

4. Open Access Play

As part of the response to the MRoP recommendations, two proposals were developed to support more proportionate standards for open access play settings, reflecting the unique nature of this provision and easing the challenges of obtaining qualifications/training for staff. The specific areas of the NMS that were impacted were;

A proposal for Standard 10: Healthcare – First Aid Open Access Play 10:28, 10:29 and 10.30 to change requirements for Paediatric First Aid.

A proposal for Standard 13 (DC): Suitable person (Day Care) Other Staff Qualifications - 13.9 (DC) to make changes to the required qualifications for other staff.

5. Standard 11 Medication and supporting Annex - Guidance for administering Liquid paracetamol when children become unwell at the registered setting

The Welsh Government issued Circular Letter 011/2024 in December 2024 in response to calls from the sector and Care Inspectorate Wales for greater clarity on the administration of non-prescribed paracetamol oral suspension (“liquid paracetamol”). This action was taken urgently to safeguard children’s health and well-being when they become unwell while attending registered child minding and daycare settings (“registered settings”).

Changes were proposed for the Standard 11 Medication with a supporting Annex to provide detailed guidance.

6. Deployment of staff in Daycare

The proposal was to seek views on additional wording to be added to Standard 13 (DC): Suitable person, to offer clarification on deployment of staff across the setting. Information was provided in instances where settings may include additional staff, which are over and above required adult: child ratios, (to support with meeting children’s individual needs).

7. Child minding Assistants

Coram PACEY Cymru reported that child minders working with assistants are experiencing difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, highlighting a need for greater flexibility. To support continuity in the sector, the proposal is to allow child minding assistants to begin work without a qualification, provided they achieve it within six months and are not left unsupervised until then. This would require changes to Standard 13 (CM) Suitable Person: Childminder. In addition, clearer guidance is required on how long assistants can be left in sole charge of children, with a proposed two-hour limit to support safe practice and consistency.

8. Ratios for child minding

An Independent Review of Childminding (2023) identified the need for greater flexibility in how child minders apply NMS staffing ratios at key transition points in the day, such as before and after school and during wrap-around care. Following detailed consideration with the NMS Advisory Group, proposals were developed to introduce proportionate flexibility while ensuring children's wellbeing remains paramount. We proposed to consult on amendments to Standard 15 (CM: Ratios (Child Minder)).

Action (post-consultation)

Following the consultation, a [summary of responses](#) has been published. This impact assessment has been updated, highlighting any negative and positive impacts of the changes. Mitigation of any negative impacts received following consultation feedback are also addressed where they refer directly to the NMS itself.

Where this is not the case, and comments received relate to issues for wider Early Years Childcare and Play policy, the issues are included, and an explanation is given of what we intend to do with this information.

A plan for implementation is also included as well as information on how evaluation and monitoring of the changes will happen, see section **Impact Assessment** below.

Five Ways of Working (The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015)

The following narrative outlines the impact of the changes under the Five Ways of Working and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Long term

The childcare and playwork sector are vital to society, supporting families and the foundational economy. Enhancing access to high-quality childcare and play provision is central to the Child Poverty Strategy's aims to eradicate child poverty and improve children's life chances. Such provision offers children the chance to learn through play, boosts their cognitive, emotional and social development, and protects their rights under the UN Convention on Children's Rights.

The Child Poverty Strategy (July 2024) purpose is to look to, and plan for, the long term and to set the objectives for contributing towards the eradication of child poverty and the eradication of the worst effects of being in poverty in Wales for the next decade or more.

The Programme for Government commitments include Government's funded childcare programmes under [Flying Start](#) expansion and the [Childcare Offer](#) extended to parents who are in education and training.

The NMS contributes to these commitments, strategies and programmes by ensuring that standards enable registered settings to provide high quality play, learning and care provision to all children no matter their background.

Our [Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales Plan \(ECPLC\)](#) was published on 15 March 2024. The plan places the child and child development at the heart of everything we do, and the NMS will align with the long-term vision for ECPLC.

We are intending as part of our proposals to strengthen the principles of ECPLC within the NMS to support the values and ambitions of this plan and to bring the voice of the child to the forefront.

The NMS provides ongoing reassurance to parents and children about the quality of care they should expect to receive from registered childcare providers i.e., including qualified staff, a suitable environment, and relevant operational policies.

Importantly, the NMS is kept under regular review to ensure it evolves alongside changes in the sector and early years childcare and play policy development.

The proposals will contribute towards realising the well-being goals relating to a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a prosperous Wales and a Wales of vibrant culture.

Integration

The Welsh Government's overall vision within the [children and young people plan](#) addresses the importance of children having the best start in life, including high-quality early years services and support for parents or carers.

At its core, the aim is that all children will have a high-quality stimulating learning and care experience in any education and childcare setting they attend. This includes better access to early education and childcare that meets their individual diverse needs and circumstances.

All the programme plans and commitments integrate with the drive to support high quality, accessible childcare which is inspected by [Care Inspectorate Wales](#) and supported by the NMS to ensure compliance with the regulations.

Prevention

Access to quality childcare can help to improve children's health and well-being, and it can help children to learn about the environment and the world around them, enriching their lives for their onward journey into adulthood.

Our vision is for children and young people to access regulated childcare and play services that are safe, high-quality and run by a skilled and experienced workforce.

Parents can be assured that their children are cared for in safe and well-run environments. Families can therefore have access to choices when choosing childcare so that they can balance their work and family priorities. Children have valuable opportunities at a young age to develop both socially and cognitively in an environment that meets their needs.

Registered providers will benefit from unambiguous and clear guidance on the requirements that they must meet under regulation and inspection.

Collaboration

Welsh Government have worked with stakeholders from across the childcare and playwork sector to consider and analyse the issues in detail. We have encouraged challenge and taken expert advice from stakeholders on considering any potential impact of proposals that may affect both the long-term availability, safety and quality of care provided, and the sustainability of the sector itself.

Involvement

The Welsh Government have worked with Care Inspectorate Wales to analyse if proposals can work in practice and tested them with the NMS Advisory Group to explore any unintended consequences. Welsh Government's [Child Poverty Strategy](#) and the [UNCRC](#) were considered throughout and [ECPLC](#) principles have guided the consideration of impact on children aged 0-5.

Costs and Savings

The overall costs for these proposals are minimal; the focus is on reflecting recommendations from reviews that we are committed to taking forward. This includes improving standards to remove any barriers and provide flexibility to childcare providers who have been involved in the review work. This increases clarity through guidance and removes ambiguity so that providers can meet the relevant regulations and standards.

Clarity within the standards can increase efficiencies when operating the childcare service. This helps to ensure children receive high quality care and experiences and parents have choice.

Standards for child minders – proposing that a child minder may look after one more child under 5 years of age (optional and criteria is applicable) and other occasions where children may be “classed” as 5 years of age (criteria applies) could improve business sustainability and help parents especially where the child minder is caring for siblings.

Where a child minder works with an assistant they may also care for children on their own (up to two hours only) increases business sustainability and allows the child minder flexibility to pick children up from other settings/schools and therefore offer effective wrap around care for children and families.

Medication - The risks and costs of obtaining and storing liquid paracetamol to administer to children in the cases that have been outlined in the proposals, are balanced by the likely benefits to the health and wellbeing of children. Provision of liquid paracetamol is not mandatory.

Sachets of paracetamol sugar free oral suspension each containing 120mg of paracetamol in each 5ml dose are recommended. In general, individual dose sachets have a higher unit cost than other liquid preparations of paracetamol (the cost of a box containing 12 x 5ml sachets of paracetamol suspension (60ml in total) retails at approximately £4.99 compared to a 100ml bottle of paracetamol oral suspension retailing at approximately £3.50). The Welsh Government recommends using sachets because they are easier to store, have labelled expiry dates, and reduce cross-contamination between children.

Importantly sachets provide the correct dose by use of a single or multiple sachets, without the need for a measuring spoon or oral syringe.

However, where sachets are unavailable, it may be appropriate for the provider to stock a bottle of liquid paracetamol containing multiple doses. In these cases, careful management of cross contamination should be planned, documented, and implemented by the manager or person responsible for administering medication. It is also necessary for anyone responsible for administering medication to have received information on the importance of following any directions for use such as shaking the bottle well before opening (to ensure correct dosing).

Open Access Playwork standards for First Aid and Other staff qualifications – There are potentially savings under training costs for open access play settings for the First Aid training and other staff qualifications proposals.

Impact Assessment

The consultation proposals we published were widely supported by consultees. We have taken account of what people have told us in their consultation comments and focus groups² and have revisited this impact assessment. As a result, we will;

- Include additional positive and negative impacts against the changes
- Explain how we intend to mitigate potential negative impacts of the changes
- Communicate to inform the sector of the changes
- Review this impact assessment in the event of significant changes to the NMS

The changes to the NMS are intended to support the registered childcare and playwork sector and bring benefits to providers, children and families in the short and long term. We will continue to work with our stakeholders to implement the changes effectively.

In the consultation a specific question was asked about the draft Impact Assessment. A summary of the feedback is included below.

Engagement Question 1: What comments, if any, do you have on the draft impact assessments, particularly impacts on children, families and those living in socio-economic disadvantage (including evidence you feel should be considered)?

Feedback on the draft impact assessment highlighted several important considerations relating to children, families, and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

² Childcare and play providers were invited to respond directly to the consultation, with some also participating in online **focus groups** organised collaboratively by Cwlwm representatives, Play Wales and Welsh Government officials. Participants were specifically selected by their respective organisations. These sessions, led by Welsh Government officials, centred on selected consultation questions pertinent to child minding, day care and open access play providers, with not all consultation question asked at each focus group. This approach enabled the collection of qualitative data directly from stakeholders. All attendees were also encouraged to complete the formal consultation response form.

Respondents recognised that the assessment identifies many key issues but viewed several areas require deeper exploration.

Staff shortages - A consistent concern relates to recruitment and retention, particularly in disadvantaged and rural areas.

Welsh medium provision - Several comments highlighted shortages of Welsh-medium childcare, particularly full-day provision, with poverty and travel costs acting as barriers for families seeking Welsh-medium options. Recruitment challenges, particularly for Welsh-speaking staff, were also noted.

Disabled children and Additional Learning Needs - Stakeholders emphasised the need for the standards to better support children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), including early identification, inclusive practice, and improved staff training.

Contributors referenced wider evidence, including the [Family Fund Cost of Caring Survey 2025](#), which illustrates the severe financial and emotional pressures faced by families of disabled or seriously ill children. These findings highlight substantial barriers to work, high levels of poverty and debt, reduced access to essential items, and considerable mental health impacts on both parents and children. Respondents felt the impact assessments should reflect these pressures and ensure that proposed standards do not exacerbate them.

Affordability - emerged as a significant theme, with questions about whether proposed changes could unintentionally increase admin and costs for providers, thereby reducing availability for families. Consideration of funding for qualifications and training was needed to help maintain access.

Accessibility – comments were made in relation to parents cutting working hours, leaving work mid-day to move children between settings as they cannot afford to pay all day when their child is eligible to start school part time.

Information - respondents noted confusion between registered and unregistered provision, stressing the need for clearer communication to ensure equitable access and choice, especially for disadvantaged families. Respondents viewed that parents should be encouraged to access various funded programmes allowing children to access provision and highlighting the positive effects of funded childcare.

Flying Start - concerns were raised about inconsistency across Local Authorities (LAs), particularly in relation to Flying Start requirements. Some providers described difficulties meeting stringent conditions, noting disparities between LAs and questioning whether current arrangements remain suitable.

Early Childhood Play Learning and Care (ECPLC) – a comment was made in relation to inclusion of ECPLC within the National Minimum Standards and the need to integrate this into Care Inspectorate Wales' inspection processes and any revised inspection framework. Local Authorities would also need to apply the ECPLC consistently when assessing quality, rather than relying on their own local approaches. Ensuring full alignment across inspection and quality-assurance systems is essential to securing positive outcomes for children and families.

Despite these challenges, respondents identified several positive impacts associated with the proposed changes. Increased ratio flexibility for child minders and clarity around assistant qualifications were seen as potentially improving availability and affordability, especially for families requiring wraparound or sibling-group care.

Stakeholders welcomed the alignment of the standards with UNCRC principles, Playwork Principles and ECPLC, noting that the focus on children's rights, emotional wellbeing, safety, and voice represents a positive strengthening of quality expectations. Respondents viewed the changes as well-considered and responsive to sector feedback, with potential to enhance access to Flying Start and Childcare Offer places and support wider socio-economic outcomes.

Overall, while the proposed standards were broadly viewed as beneficial and child-centred, respondents stressed the importance of addressing workforce challenges, ensuring affordability, supporting Welsh-medium provision, and maintaining equity across local authorities. They emphasised that meaningful improvements would require sustained investment in staffing, training, and sector sustainability to ensure children and families, particularly those facing disadvantage, are not negatively affected. Welsh Government will continue to work closely with CWLWM childcare consortium and key stakeholders to support the sector's sustainability and delivery of high-quality childcare.

Impact of changes – Positive and Negative

Structure and layout of the NMS document

Changes:

Layout of the NMS (a mock up example of Standard 12: Food & Drink was provided)

Include related regulations (Child Minding and Day Care (Wales) Regulations 2010, as amended) within the standards

Include links to further guidance and support

Positive

- ✓ Moving to a HTML format has a positive impact providing an accessible, clearer, easier to navigate document with hyperlinks to regulations and further support and guidance which supports childcare and playwork providers to meet the necessary regulatory requirements
- ✓ A user-friendly NMS can help providers with induction and training for staff
- ✓ Builds and may improve Care Inspectorate Wales inspector and provider dialogue

Negative

Most comments we received were positive. The main negative impacts received, broadly related to:

- Comments about alignment and relationship of the NMS with CIW inspection framework/outcomes and other existing frameworks.

- Changing the look of the NMS could take time to adjust to and the volume of information and hyperlinks could be overwhelming for some users.
- Respondents called for more content on caring for disabled children or those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

Mitigation

CIW are currently revising their inspection framework for childcare and play settings, and we will work in close collaboration with them to ensure that the updated framework appropriately reflects the refreshed NMS.

Working with our technical team will ensure the document is user-friendly and we will let the sector know what the latest changes are when we refresh the NMS.

Welsh Government will maintain the NMS on a regular basis, checking for updates.

We will collaborate with our stakeholders (Care Inspectorate Wales, Cwlmw, Play Wales, local authority childcare leads) to ensure providers are effectively supported to adopt the new format and understand the changes.

In response to information about children's needs, the NMS contains several relevant standards to meet children's rights. *Standard 4: Meeting individual needs* and *Standard 16: Equal Opportunities* address the needs of all children including those with ALN and disabled children. Relevant links to regulations and further guidance and support will be provided under each standard when the next update is published.

High Quality Provision - *What do we mean by High Quality provision?*

Change: Updating "What do we mean by High Quality Provision?" to align with ECPLC

Positive

- ✓ Aligning the NMS to Early Childhood Play Learning and Care (ECPLC) principles shows a high level of support by providers.
- ✓ Supports Welsh Government's vision for high quality childcare and play and respond to requirements of the sector to reduce complexities of guidance documents.
- ✓ Encourages a consistent set of ECPLC principles when caring for children - more holistic, rights-based approach; aligns with Flying Start, local authority quality assurance tools, and CIW's continuous-improvement vision.
- ✓ Including child's voice and wellbeing outcomes makes the NMS more child-centred

Negative

Most of the comments received were supportive of aligning the NMS with ECPLC principles. The main negative impacts received, broadly related to:

- Respondents felt that there was a risk of unrealistic expectations of small providers
- A possible administrative burden on providers
- Provision of access and time for training in ECPLC
- Some respondents commented that they were unaware of ECPLC.

Mitigation

We will continue to promote the ECPLC resources that support providers and can be used flexibly. We will also work with our stakeholders to raise awareness of ECPLC principles.

Definitions

Change: Updated definition of Open Access Play (OAP)

Positive

- ✓ A revised definition of Open Access Playwork co-produced with Play Wales/PETC Wales responds to recommendation 11.3 of the MRoP which will help improve understanding of the unique nature of this provision
- ✓ Provides a distinction between open access play and childcare

Negative

Many of the comments received were supportive of these changes. The main negative impacts received, broadly related to:

- Respondents highlighted concerns about young children (as young as 5 years) leaving unescorted from open access play provision.
- Respondents felt that it was important to outline the operational arrangements e.g., operating hours/staff presence of the setting
- Arrangements for the inclusion and accessibility of provision for disabled/seriously ill children should be outlined
- Risk of ambiguity if the “under 2 hours” reference in the NMS disappears as it could mislead on registration needs.

Mitigation – we will continue to work with Play Wales and Playwork Education and Training Council for Wales (PETC Wales) to consider further refinement of the definition to mitigate any negative impacts that have been identified.

The standards support all regulated child minding and day care settings to meet registration requirements which include OAP operating over 2 hours or more.

Open Access Playwork standards

Changes:

First Aid – Open Access Play (proportionate approach: at least 1 fully-qualified first aider + risk-based contingencies)

Standard 13 (OAP) – proportionate approach to Other Staff (Qualifications)

Positive

- ✓ Responds to recommendation 11.1 of the Ministerial Review of Play (MRoP) regarding standalone proportionate open access playwork standards.
- ✓ Supports seasonal and temporary nature of provision and sustainability; aligns with the characteristics the sector.

- ✓ Changes to specific standards for First Aid and Staff Qualifications enables the registered provider to operate proportionately
- ✓ Flexibility for other staff qualifications helps recruitment/retention and sector sustainability may encourage more settings to register, balances judgement with higher qualified oversight.

Negative

Many of the comments received were supportive of these changes. The main negative impacts received, broadly related to:

- We do not know whether the proposals will improve the decline in numbers of registered open access playwork settings in Wales
- There may still be challenges recruiting staff for short periods of time
- Concerns around low numbers of first aiders including monitoring and consistency
- Request for templates, and clear risk assessment guidance if changes made
- Need identified for additional staff training for disabled children or those with complex health needs

Mitigation – We will collaborate with Play Wales to ensure the open access play sector are supported with any proposed changes to Open Access Play provision.

The proposal to change first aid requirements for open access play included narrative that the registered person must ensure there are risk assessments in place when they are operating with the minimum first aid requirement.

We will consider whether the support for disabled children and those with complex health needs is already covered under other relevant standards e.g., *Standard 4: Meeting Individual Needs* and *Standard 10: Healthcare*.

Medication

Change: Standard 11 (Medication) – clearer distinction prescribed vs non-prescribed; liquid paracetamol and Annex [tbc] *Guidance for administering Liquid paracetamol when children become unwell at the setting*

Positive

- ✓ Clarity and guidance provided about administering liquid paracetamol and what to do if a child becomes unwell during their time at the registered setting is provided
- ✓ Faster and more consistent response to protect the health and well-being of the child and increases understanding for parents about arrangements when a child becomes unwell
- ✓ Helps the registered setting to safely administer Liquid Paracetamol in the circumstances described in the standards and guidance

Negative

Many of the comments received were supportive of these changes. The main negative impacts received, broadly related to:

- Several practical implications were received relating to provision of a locked container requirement vs the need for rapid access to medication
- Implications of Liquid Paracetamol sachets vs bottles
- Clarification on how a registered setting handles a child who is teething

Mitigation

We will refine and explore a more practical risk-based approach for the storage of Liquid Paracetamol that could be needed for more “rapid response” situations.

In line with the *regulation 26 Use and storage of medicines*, we will strengthen the standards to ensure that **any** medication is inaccessible to children. Where children can self-administer medication, the standards will ensure that they are supervised when doing so.

The draft Annex [tbc] *Guidance for administering Liquid paracetamol when children become unwell at the setting* published at consultation, contains guidance about the provision of sachets and bottles of Liquid Paracetamol.

We will collaborate with childcare umbrella organisations to ensure the sector is supported with appropriate advice which aligns with the setting’s Statement of Purpose, the NMS and Public Health Wales guidance in relation to these changes.

Deployment of staff in Daycare

Changes:

Standard 13 (DC) – apply qualified/unqualified percentages across the whole setting (not room-by-room)

Standard 13 (DC) – deploy extra staff for individual needs; 1:1 support not counted in core ratios

Positive

- ✓ Clarifying effective deployment of staff (percentages) across the setting rather than on a room-by-room basis in the standards provides a more flexible and dynamic approach to ratios whilst emphasising the safety, welfare, development and individual needs of children are always met, including those with ALN, emerging needs and disabled children.
- ✓ Deploying more staff in individual rooms to meet children’s specific needs allows registered settings flexibility based on a considered assessment and whilst still meeting minimum adult: child ratios. Clarifies inclusion practice; prevents “ratio inflation” when a staff member is dedicated to one child; supports equitable care.

Negative

Many of the comments received were supportive of these changes. The main negative impacts received, broadly related to:

- There is a risk that some rooms may lack a qualified presence at times
- CIW inspection consistency concerns
- Potential disadvantage to children with ALN if deployment isn't needs-led.
- Recruitment and funding feasibility for additional staff
- There is ambiguity where roles are mixed

Mitigation

In meeting requirements under Regulation 27: Staffing the registered person must ensure there is sufficient number of suitably qualified, skilled and experienced persons to safeguard and promote children's health and wellbeing needs. We will consider in collaboration with Cwlwm the sector's support needs regarding effective deployment of staff to meet regulatory requirements.

CIW are currently revising their inspection framework for childcare and play settings, and we will work in close collaboration with them to ensure that the updated framework appropriately reflects the refreshed NMS.

We will consider and share concerns of the financial pressures on the sector to care for children with additional support needs with wider Welsh Government policy areas.

Child minder assistants

Change:

- a) Childminder assistants can start work whilst completing a childminder assistant qualification; providing that they are not in sole charge of children until qualified; 6-month completion window for qualification**

Positive

- ✓ Proposals for providing a working towards qualification timescale for child minding assistants to achieve qualifications whilst in employment can ease recruitment issues.
- ✓ Helps with continuity of service; embeds mandatory checks and core training; clearer timeframe and safeguards.

Negative

Many of the comments received were supportive of these changes. The main negative impacts received, broadly related to:

- Supervising the childminding assistant whilst they are “working towards qualification” may be burdensome
- Six months may be too short in some pathways/circumstances; financial/training access barriers
- Some arguments related to limited utility if assistants can’t be [left?] unsupervised.

Mitigation

CIW are currently revising their inspection framework for childcare and play settings, and we will work in close collaboration with CIW colleagues to ensure that the updated framework appropriately reflects the refreshed National Minimum Standards.

The standards note that mandatory checks and training are required before an assistant starts, with there being no proposal to change these. Consider whether there are any refinement to standards needed to ensure this is clear.

- b) Childminding assistants (qualified): can be in sole charge up to 2 hours/day with all requirements in Annex A - NMS Guidance for Child minder Assistants of the NMS & Standard 13 requirements are met**

Positive

- ✓ Clarification on the length of time a childminding assistant can be left in sole charge of children provides clarity for the sector and mitigates decline in child minding and provides reassurance for parents.
- ✓ Enables school runs/emergencies without disrupting younger children; provides clarity that didn’t previously exist.

Negative

- Comments received in relation to these changes related to: Some respondents requested an extension to 3 hours (rather than 2hours) that childminder assistant is in sole charge of children
- Time cap adequacy in rural contexts; parity concerns with day-care; qualification/experience threshold needs clarity.

Mitigation

We will work with our stakeholders to address any negative impacts of our proposals.

Coram Pacey Cymru, the professional organisation that supports the child minding sector have raised concerns during the consultation period that on reflection a 3-hour rule would support child minders working in rural areas. Given the broad support for the 2 hours through consultation responses, we will check for any unintended consequences for the 2 hours implementation.

Ratios for child minding

Change:

a) Ratios change – the maximum number of children for whom a childminder can care for:

Ten children up to 12 years of age;

Of those ten children, no more than six may be under 8 years of age.

Of those six, no more than four may be under 5 years of age.

Of those four no more than three may be under 2 years of age

Of those three children, normally no more than two may be under 18 months of age, although exceptions can be made for siblings.'

Positive

- ✓ The proposals respond to recommendation 15 from the Independent Review of Child minding and seek to address the decline of the child minder sector due to business sustainability.
- ✓ Flexibility for overlaps, variable work patterns, emergencies; supports sibling continuity and business viability, potentially slowing sector decline.
- ✓ Proposals offer flexibility for adult to child ratios for children under 5 years old while continuing to offer parents a choice
- ✓ Supports the sustainability of the childcare sector to continue to meet the needs of children and their families and takes account of parental preferences
- ✓ Proposal can also support Welsh Government funding programmes such as the Childcare Offer for Wales and Flying Start.

Negative

Many of the comments received were supportive of these changes however the following negative impacts were received highlighting:

- Safety/quality concerns if not risk-assessed; parity with day care; ALN/younger children may need higher adult attention; wide age-range management.
- The number of children under 5yrs old that childminders can care for will increase, which may have an impact on the care provided if professional judgement regarding children's needs is not applied effectively by childminders.
- Numbers of child minders may continue to decline despite best efforts
- Parental work patterns, location and choice can influence decisions when choosing childcare options e.g., Day care, child minding

Mitigation

Further work with partners to discuss whether any refinements are required to support decision making, being focused on children's needs.

Consider with partners strengthening guidance to require the completion of risk assessments to support decision making with regard to use of ratios (considering ages, individual needs, environment)

b) Treat children due to start full-time school (Reception in Sept) as over 5 during the preceding summer holidays (for CM ratios)

Positive

- ✓ Enhancing flexibility supports the integration of new starters, promotes continuity of care for families, enables sibling groups to remain together, and contributes to overall sustainability.

Negative

Many of the comments received were supportive of these changes however the following broad negative impact was received:

- Developmental gap between 4 and 5; safety/supervision concerns; parity with other sectors; definitional clarity (statutory age, inset days).

Mitigation - Further work with partners to discuss any negative impact fully and whether there are mitigations that could be applied. Potential mitigations include Requiring a child-level risk assessment (maturity, independence, toileting, regulation) and parental agreement. Define terms and dates (what counts as “summer holidays,” treatment of inset days) to ensure consistent application.

Change:

c) Treat 3–5s who attend an educational provision or a combination of an educational provision and wrap-around childcare within school hours at another setting for five or more hours per day could be classed as over 5 for CM ratios

Positive

- ✓ Supports wrap-around flexibility and sustainability, especially in rural contexts and for session overlaps.

Negative

Many of the comments received were supportive of these changes however the following negative impacts were received highlighting:

- Developmental appropriateness: 3–4s often require higher support; parity with nurseries/Flying Start; definitional clarity (what counts as “educational provision,”

calculating “five hours,” holidays/inset days). Potential to confuse or be misused without guardrails.

Mitigation - Further work with partners to discuss any negative impact fully and whether there are mitigations that could be applied.

Make reclassification discretionary, based on a documented developmental assessment and parental agreement, not automatic attendance.

Define education/wraparound precisely; state whether term breaks/inset are included; require ongoing review where a child’s needs remain closer to under-5s.

Wellbeing Goals - Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials

The proposals outlined above will play an important part in supporting the general principle of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which is about making positive interventions now, to benefit people living their lives in Wales in the future.

The updated NMS will help to ensure that children are cared for in a safe, secure and appropriate environment and support our [ECPLC plan](#) and principles which focuses on child development and is key to enable children to have the best start in life.

The changes contribute towards the Act’s Well-being goals, in particular:

A prosperous Wales

- Supports the sustainability of the childcare and playwork sector as a key part of the foundational economy.
- Enables parents to return to work/ training or education, increase their hours and support those working irregular hours.
- Ensures the availability of regulated childcare places and provides parental choice

A healthier Wales

- Promotes good health and well-being for everyone, reducing stress and anxiety associated with business sustainability and for families finding additional childcare.
- Providing a safe, caring, nurturing and learning environment for children.
- Access to high quality safe and secure childcare and playwork improves children’s physical and mental health and well-being.
- Provides opportunities for children to play.
- Childcare and playwork settings provide children with access to qualified playwork workers who can support their play.

A more equal Wales

- Ensures that all children can access quality provision, helping to reduce the gap between the least and most deprived in our communities.
- High quality childcare provision can have a positive influence on a child's development and help them develop to their full potential. Evidence suggests children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit more from quality childcare and that it can help redress both developmental disadvantages and the attainment gap.

A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language

- The NMS already helps to ensure children can access Welsh medium provision. Opportunities available for children from Welsh speaking families and those who do not come from Welsh medium families, gives them the opportunity to socialise and play through the medium of Welsh. The NMS supports children needs and preferences of language choice being met and understood.

Implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Any changes we implement will be in conjunction with the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) who inspect registered settings and members of the Cwlwm childcare consortium and Play Wales who represent childcare and playwork providers. As part of this work and ongoing engagement we will monitor and evaluate the impact of any potential long term changes to the NMS on the safety and quality of care provided.

We will continue to seek feedback from the sector on the effectiveness of any updates to the NMS, and the ongoing impact of any additional guidance, considering any improvements that may be required in future. We will also seek feedback on a regular basis from CIW who regulate and inspect childcare settings on behalf of Welsh Ministers.

It is our duty to engage and consult in certain circumstances, and there is clear evidence that involving the public and stakeholders is central to successful policy and delivery. In keeping with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, we are committed to involving people within our policy development work.

A. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1. Policy objectives

Background

The ambition set out in the Welsh Government's *Children and Young People's Plan* is for Wales to be "a wonderful place to grow up, live and to work, now and in the future." In Wales, we want every child to have the best possible start in life. Childhood should be a time filled with fun, exploration, discovery and curiosity. Ensuring access to sufficient, high-quality childcare supports this ambition and aligns with the *Programme for Government* commitment to give every child the opportunity to thrive. By providing high-quality childcare that meets children's needs, we can support their development, wellbeing and everyday experiences.

The proposed changes to the National Minimum Standards (NMS) stem from recommendations made in the *Review of the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare (2019)*, the *Ministerial Review of Play (2023)* and the *Independent Review of Childminding (2023)*, alongside insights gathered through pre-consultation engagement with the sector. We have collaborated with a wide range of partners and representatives across the childcare and playwork sector to review these key recommendations, develop a shared understanding of how the current NMS are operating in practice, identify challenges faced by providers, and consider how best to address them. To understand what high-quality childcare looks like from the perspective of parents and children, we also worked with Children in Wales through focus groups, framing questions to gather their views and experiences of childcare and play.

The overarching priority for any proposed changes to the NMS is to provide greater clarity and guidance across several key areas, with a strong focus on introducing proportionate flexibility, supporting long term sustainability, and strengthening the viability of childcare and playwork provision. Careful consideration has been given to the potential impact of all proposed changes on children's safety and the quality of care they receive, ensuring that children in Wales can continue to access high quality childcare and play opportunities that meet their needs and those of their families. The review has been carried out with the best interests of children at its core, ensuring these remain central to policy development and outcomes.

The changes outlined below are structured into topic areas with brief evidence to explain the rationale for change. For this CRIA, we have only considered impacts on questions which were consulted on as part of the consultation. The consultation questions gathered views about how the changes proposed may affect children's rights.

Changes to the NMS

Structure and layout of the National Minimum Standards

In response to Recommendation 20 of the 2019 NMS review, which highlighted the need to simplify the structure and presentation of the Standards. Engagement with the NMS Advisory Group confirmed the value of developing an accessible online HTML version of the NMS to improve clarity, navigation and usability for providers, parents and carers.

A draft example of an NMS (Food and Drink) was provided at consultation with the aim to gather views on whether this revised format, including clearer layout and links to regulations and best-practice guidance, would better support providers to understand and meet the standards and improve outcomes for children across Wales.

High Quality Provision – *What do we mean by High Quality Provision?*

This proposal was taken forward to strengthen alignment between the National Minimum Standards (NMS) and the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) principles published in March 2024. ECPLC sets out a rights-based, child-centred vision for supporting babies' and children's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development, and stakeholders have endorsed embedding these principles more clearly within the NMS. Consulting on updates to the introduction chapter, "*What do we mean by High Quality Provision*", will help clarify expectations for high-quality practice and ensure providers understand how to apply ECPLC principles in day-to-day care for children aged 0–12.

Strengthening this section will support practitioners to deliver consistent, high-quality play, learning and care; enable parents and carers to better understand what high-quality provision looks like; and ultimately improve outcomes for children by ensuring they are cared for by practitioners who are equipped with the tools and guidance needed to give them the best possible start in life.

Definitions

The consultation on this proposal was taken forward in response to Recommendation 11.3 of the Ministerial Review of Play, which asked the Welsh Government to review and update the definition of open access playwork and the settings in which it operates. Engagement with Playwork Education and Training Council for Wales (PETC Wales) and Play Wales indicated that the current definition does not fully reflect the distinct nature of open access playwork. A revised definition was developed and consulted on. Agreeing these changes will help improve understanding of the unique nature of open access playwork and ensure that children—particularly those aged 5 and over—benefit from clearer, more accurate information about the range of play settings available to them, as set out in *Wales – a Play Friendly Country* statutory guidance.

Open Access Play Standards

The Ministerial Review of Play (MRoP) published in 2023, also included recommendation 11: To Review child minding and day care regulations and orders relating to playwork. Specific milestones 11.1 and 11.3 (see above) that impacted on open access playwork in the NMS were accepted.

11.1: Review the practice and delivery of the Care Inspectorate Wales inspection regime relating to playwork to improve its fitness for purpose within the current regulations. This should inform changes to the National Minimum Standards (NMS) and the regulation and inspection of all playwork settings and should also include the development of standalone NMS for open access playwork settings.

Recommendation 11.1 contained two parts. CIW are reviewing their inspection frameworks, and further updates will be reported within the MRoP progress report.

The second part of this work focuses on developing standalone open access playwork standards. The review has identified that some of the current NMS requirements create barriers for providers wishing to register open access play settings. Addressing these barriers is essential to prevent further decline in provision and to increase the number of safe, high quality play opportunities available to children.

Although open access playwork is currently categorised as daycare under The Child Minding and Day Care (Wales) Regulations 2010, the nature of this provision is distinct. Children often attend freely and independently, and the structure, staffing patterns and environment differ significantly from daycare settings. As a result, several existing NMS standards, or parts of them, do not currently apply in a meaningful or proportionate way. These include, **Standard 10: Healthcare** specifically open access play standards **10:28, 10:29 and 10:30** and **Standard 13 (DC): Suitable person (Day Care) Other Staff Qualifications - 13.9 (DC) For Open Access Play**

To ensure that children can access safe, engaging, and developmentally supportive play environments, we are developing a tailored set of proportionate standards specifically for open access playwork. These bespoke standards will better reflect how provision operates in practice, while still upholding the regulatory requirements set out in the 2010 Regulations. The intention is to create standards that support children's rights to play, enhance their safety and wellbeing, and enable more settings to register and remain sustainable in the long term.

First Aid Training – Open Access Play: Standards 10: Healthcare – Standards 10.28, 10.29 and 10.30

The first aid requirements in the NMS do not fully reflect how open access playwork operates, particularly where staff are employed only for short or temporary periods. This can make it difficult for providers to recruit suitable persons, which in turn can limit children's access to safe, high quality play opportunities.

To address this, we proposed a more proportionate approach that continues to prioritise children's safety while recognising the practical realities of this part of the sector. A more flexible model is expected to support better staffing levels, reduce costs for providers, and help ensure that more open access play settings remain available for children in their communities.

The consultation therefore seeks views on amending Standard 10 – First Aid Training for Open Access Play – so that at least one fully qualified first aider is always present. Providers would also be encouraged to train additional staff wherever possible, as this strengthens children's safety and resilience during emergencies. Decisions about the appropriate number of trained first aiders would be guided by a risk assessment that considers:

- the types of activities children will be taking part in
- the size and layout of the play space
- the number of children attending
- the specific needs of individual children

This approach ensures that children’s safety needs are considered carefully and deliberately, rather than applying a “one size fits all” rule that may not be suited to open access play settings.

While the proposed change reduces the minimum number of first aid trained staff required at all times, a robust risk-based assessment will help ensure that children continue to receive safe, responsive care. By allowing providers to recruit staff more easily and keep settings open, the impact of the change aims to increase children’s access to safe places to play, socialise, and develop—while maintaining a clear focus on their wellbeing.

Standard 13 (DC): Suitable person (Day Care) Other Staff Qualifications - 13.9 (DC) For Open Access Play

Play Wales has highlighted ongoing challenges in recruiting staff who meet the current NMS qualification requirements, largely due to the temporary and short-term nature of open access playwork settings. The existing prescribed qualifications within the NMS do not fully reflect how this provision operates, where staff are often engaged for limited operating periods.

To address this, the consultation proposes amending Standard 13.9 (DC) so that the person in charge must hold at least a Level 3 playwork qualification, with 50% of other staff holding a Level 2 playwork qualification. All qualifications must be recognised on the Playwork Education and Training Council (PETC) for Wales list. Staff or volunteers who are not yet qualified must be competent, fully supervised, and have completed all required checks, completed induction training relevant to their role and work alongside staff who are qualified to the required level.

These proposed changes aim to create a more proportionate set of standards that take account of the temporary nature of open access playwork and support the sustainability of the sector. This will help increase the number of registered services and ensure that children have access to safe, well run play opportunities staffed by suitable adults. The proposed adjustments to standards on First Aid and Staff Qualifications are intended to allow providers to operate flexibly while maintaining a clear focus on children’s wellbeing and safety through appropriate risk assessments.

This proportionate approach is expected to have a positive impact on children by improving access to registered open access play settings across Wales. Although there may be a reduction in the proportion of qualified staff, this is balanced by the increased availability of staffed, safe play environments. The person in charge will continue to be responsible for ensuring that all staff follow established standards and guidance to support high quality provision.

Standard 11: Medication – Liquid Paracetamol

The proposed changes to Standard 11 aim to strengthen how childcare settings respond when a child becomes unwell whilst being cared for at the registered setting. The intention is to clarify the arrangements for non-prescribed liquid paracetamol administration, so children will receive quicker relief from pain or high temperature, reducing the likelihood of their condition worsening while in care.

The introduction of clear guidance, including a new Annex and distinction between prescribed and non-prescribed medication, ensures that staff understand safe, appropriate procedures. This supports consistent practice across settings, reduces risks such as cross-contamination, and ensures children's health needs are prioritised.

Allowing providers to hold single-dose sachets, or bottles where risk-managed appropriately, means children can be treated promptly, with parents reassured that any medication will be given safely and with their consent.

The impact of the changes will create a clearer, safer system that protects children's wellbeing, enables timely intervention, and strengthens collaboration between staff and parents to support each child's care.

Deployment of Staff - Standard 13 (DC) Suitable Person

Clarifying how staff are deployed across a setting will ensure that children receive the support they need at the right time, from the right people. By confirming that qualification percentages apply across the whole setting, not per room, providers will have greater flexibility to position staff where children's needs are greatest. This enables more responsive, child-centred care particularly for disabled children, or those with ALN or emerging needs. The responsibility of effective deployment of staff remains the responsibility of the registered person.

Clarifying that additional staff or volunteers who are supporting individual children—are not counted within qualification ratios—ensures that children who require extra or specialist help can access it without disadvantaging the rest of the group, or concerns of perceived dilution of ratios. This supports inclusion, improves wellbeing and strengthens children's daily experiences.

Overall, the changes will impact positively on children's safety, nurture, and development by ensuring staffing arrangements are flexible, proportionate and tailored to children's needs. The registered person remains responsible for the effective deployment of staff and robust oversight of the provision.

NMS Guidance for Child Minder Assistants - Standard 13: Suitable Person (CM) and Annex A

In the 2023 update to the NMS, child-minding assistants were required to achieve a recognised qualification by November 2024. Feedback from Coram PACEY Cymru highlighted that this change may have led some assistants to leave their roles and created difficulties for child minders trying to recruit new assistants. These challenges have contributed to ongoing staffing pressures within the sector.

To respond to this, we consulted on a proposal that will allow some flexibility which may help maintain continuity in the child-minding sector. Through the proposal, this will mean that child minding assistants can be employed initially without a formal qualification and 'work towards' the required qualification within a 6-month timeframe. However, a caveat has been considered to ensure the safety of children, with amendments to Standard 13.4(CM) that child minding assistants cannot be left alone in sole charge of children until

the qualification is obtained. This will help to mitigate any risks associated with the assistant being unqualified for a short period of time following employment.

Care Inspectorate Wales and Coram Pacey Cymru noted that child minders have also expressed the need for clearer guidance regarding conditions whereby assistants may have sole charge of children because the current lack of a time limit within the NMS is leading to confusion and potential misuse. In response to this we consulted on the maximum length of time a qualified child minder assistant can be left in sole charge of children.

The changes will provide clearer guidance and support child minders in managing their practice by enabling them to more easily appoint an assistant to support and enhance the provision for their children. It will remove any ambiguity about the role of the child minder assistant compared with the registered child minder as well as ensure compliance with the NMS and regulations. Amending Standard 13.4 (CM) to allow child minding assistants to be employed without a formal qualification but be working towards a qualification will also ease pressure on recruitment.

A maximum time limit for child minding assistants to be left in sole charge of children, subject to all other requirements within the guidance being met, will help to provide clearer guidance and support child minders in managing their practice and provide reassurance for parents. Both changes will support the sustainability of the child-minding business model with the subsequent benefit of a range of childcare solutions being available to parents and carers.

This will have a positive impact on children who attend child minding settings across Wales by providing greater clarity for their parents and carers about the role that child minder assistants will have in caring for their children and enable them to make informed decisions about their child's care.

Ratios (Child Minding) - Standard 15 (CM):

[The Independent review of childminding \(2023\)](#) examined why the number of child minders has declined. Recommendation 15 asked Care Inspectorate Wales to consider introducing greater flexibility in how child minders apply NMS staffing ratios during short periods of the day—for example, before and after school or during wrap-around care at lunchtime when childminders may be involved in dropping off or collecting children from school.

Given the significant decrease in child minders over the past five years, and the need to maintain parental choice, the consultation proposed revising current ratio requirements.

Following detailed work with the NMS Advisory Group, we consulted on changes that would allow child minders to care for **one additional child under 5** (excluding children under 18 months).

Further proposals would allow:

- Children due to start full-time statutory education in September to be treated as *over 5* during the preceding summer holidays for ratio purposes.

- Children aged 3–5 who spend five or more hours per day in education (or a mix of education and wrap-around childcare elsewhere) to also be treated as over 5 for ratio purposes.

These changes are impactful as they strengthen the sustainability of the child-minding sector by providing more flexibility, helping child minders support sibling groups, and maintaining continuity of care. This can benefit children’s wellbeing by allowing them to stay with a known, trusted professional alongside their siblings. The proposals also support parents, particularly those with disabled children, cultural or language preferences, or atypical working hours, by increasing the availability of suitable childcare options.

Summary

The NMS consultation was carried out with the best interests of children at its core. The process has actively recognised and valued the views of those who took part, ensuring that those impacted by the proposals have helped shape them. Throughout the review, we have engaged closely with stakeholders to consider recommendations and develop meaningful, long-term improvements. Our approach has prioritised children’s safety and wellbeing while also supporting the sustainability and viability of private, third sector and public childcare and playwork providers.

The changes to the NMS are intended to improve outcomes for children, strengthen the sustainability of the sector, and support the recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce. This will help ensure that families continue to have access to high quality, accessible childcare. High quality provision plays a vital role in supporting children’s development and helping them reach their full potential. Developing the consultation proposals collaboratively with the childcare and play sector and umbrella organisations has enabled robust feedback and coproduction, helping to ensure that updated standards and changes are clear, practical and fit for purpose for the future.

The implementation of changes to the NMS will be undertaken in close partnership with local authorities, and childcare and play umbrella organisations. This collaborative approach will help ensure that the revised guidance is both operationally workable and aligned with the sector’s needs, supporting providers to meet regulatory requirements.

2. Gathering evidence and engaging with children and young People

The availability of quality childcare, play and activities offers vital social, economic and educational benefits to children and families. Research commissioned by the [Department of Education \(DfE\) in 2022](#) identified that the main reason for parents using childcare was to facilitate them to work, but that the child’s socialisation and development was also a key benefit. Parents viewed availability of quality and flexibility of care as imperative to meet the needs of children and their families. Local Authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments and engagement with the sector tells us that the Coronavirus pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have affected the sustainability of childcare sector, its workforce, and the working lives of parents and children.

Evidence shows that access to high quality childcare and play is beneficial for all children in their early years³. It can play a significant role in addressing the attainment gap, in developing their social skills and supporting children in preparing for school. Skilled, supported and well-qualified practitioners are a key element of high-quality childcare and playwork and make a proven difference to children’s learning and development, particularly for children from low income and at-risk families⁴.

We want children from all backgrounds across Wales to have the best start in life and those who care for our children play a vital role in helping us achieve this vision set out in our 10-year childcare play and early year’s workforce plan⁵ - to support and develop a highly skilled workforce regarded as a profession and career of choice.

The aim of the consultation proposals was to ensure families continue to access high quality, accessible childcare that supports children’s development and enables them to reach their full potential through strengthening the sustainability of the sector; and supporting the recruitment of a skilled workforce.

Engagement

Children

Engagement was undertaken with children aged **2–10 years** through **focus groups** facilitated by Children in Wales. Children participated in structured discussions exploring their childcare and play experiences, what they enjoy, and any barriers they face. Practitioners involved helping facilitate these sessions had previously completed **Early Years Rights training**, ensuring consultation activities were rights-based and

³ <https://www.eif.org.uk/blog/early-years-education-what-does-high-quality-provision-look-like>

⁴ [Early-Years-Impact-Brief.pdf \(suttontrust.com\)](#)

⁵ [Childcare, play and early years workforce plan | GOV.WALES](#)

developmentally appropriate.

Children **aged 0–2 years** were not directly consulted; instead, their views were gathered **via parents** through targeted focus groups and one-to-one interviews.

Participants included a diverse range of children, including **disabled children** and those with **Additional Learning Needs (ALN)**.

Parents

Parents were engaged through **focus groups** and **individual interviews**, capturing perspectives on childcare quality, affordability, accessibility and inclusion. Parents of **children with ALN** contributed detailed insights into the challenges they face securing suitable childcare. Engagement was designed to reflect a broad range of family experiences across Wales.

Childcare Settings and Practitioners

Practitioners from settings across Wales participated in focus groups led by Children in Wales. These settings were selected due to their prior involvement in **Children’s Rights and Participation training**, strengthening the quality of consultation.

Further engagement with the sector occurred through **pre-consultation events** and **working groups**, involving representatives from AWARE (local authority childcare leads), Social Care Wales, Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales, Play Wales and the CWLWM partners. These groups contributed sector expertise and highlighted operational and workforce pressures impacting the delivery of childcare.

What Children, Parents and Settings Told Us

Children’s Views

- **Aged 0–2 (via parents):** Strong emphasis on the need for *safe places* and *keeping children safe*.
- **Aged 2–5:** Identified caregivers as central to their feelings of *safety, security and happiness*. Described childcare as a *happy and fun* environment where they can play and form connections.
- **Aged 4–10:** Recognised childcare as a place to *play, socialise and learn*, while also understanding its role in supporting parents’ ability to work.

Parents’ Views

Parents highlighted:

- The importance of **safe, trusted and high-quality childcare** where children can learn, socialise and develop.
- **Key barriers** including high cost, limited availability, and shortages in staff and training capacity.

- Parents of children with ALN emphasised a **lack of inclusive options**, insufficient staffing and limited provision able to meet individual needs.
Parents recommended improved access to information, increased cultural competency in childcare, more affordable provision, and enhanced support for children with ALN.

Practitioners' Views

Practitioners shared:

- Pressure arising from **recruitment and retention** challenges and limited availability of training.
- Concerns about **childminding ratios**, particularly their impact on sibling placements and continuity of care.
This evidence aligned with findings from the Independent Review of Childminding.

How the changes to the NMS will support all stakeholders

Strengthening Support for Children with ALN

We are updating **NMS Standard 13 (DC) Suitable Person** to provide clearer guidance on staff deployment, including appropriate use of additional staff or volunteers **over and above required ratios** to meet individual needs. Clarification that staffing percentages apply **across the whole setting** will improve flexibility and ensure children's needs are met more effectively. These changes aim to enhance inclusion and provide greater assurance to parents.

Responding to Childminder Feedback

To address sustainability and continuity of care for families and support with keeping siblings together, proposed changes to **NMS Standard 15 (Child-minding Ratios)** include:

- Allowing **one additional under-5** (excluding children under 18 months).
- Treating children due to start school as "over 5" during the preceding summer.
- Counting 3–5-year-olds attending education for 5+ hours per day as "over 5" for ratio purposes.

These adjustments will support continuity of care and strengthen sector stability.

Embedding High-Quality Provision and the Child's Voice

We are strengthening the "High-Quality Provision" section of the NMS to ensure alignment with **ECPLC principles** and to clarify expectations of high-quality practice.

The **child's voice and wellbeing outcome will be embedded in every NMS standard**,

supporting providers to reflect children's perspectives in daily practice and helping parents understand what high-quality childcare looks like.

We will continue engaging with key stakeholders to support the development of these, ensuring that the child's perspective is carefully considered. We will also have due regard to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that: *children have the right to express their views regarding decisions that affect them, and that their opinions must be taken into account.*

This CRIA has been updated now that the consultation has closed. We will work with our stakeholders to develop a plan for implementation and consider the impact of changes operationally before a refreshed NMS is published.

The Welsh Government will continue to work closely with the sector (including working with umbrella organisations who represent the sector, local authorities and other key stakeholders) to ensure that they are informed of developments and involved in the work.

Considering this, wherever possible, steps will be put in place to ensure accessible information is provided. The wording of the final updated NMS guidance will be informed by feedback received from the consultation.

The impacts for this piece of work are considered positive.

Links with other policy areas

Proposed amendments to the NMS have been considered alongside the current review of [The Child Minding and Day Care Exceptions \(Wales\) Order 2010](#). The standards relating to different age children set out in the current NMS were considered when identifying potential amendments to improve safeguarding of the youngest, most vulnerable children. Specific standards relating to different setting types were also considered.

3. Analysing the evidence and assessing the impact

The changes to the [National Minimum Standards \(NMS\) for Regulated Childcare for children up to 12 years](#) will impact on the safety and wellbeing of children by providing greater clarity and guidance for childcare providers in how they meet the required standards. There is a focus on supporting the sustainability of the sector and developing the employment of staff across settings to recruit highly skilled workers which could allow settings who are currently struggling to remain operational. There will be a focus on developing the child's voice and the inclusion of wellbeing outcomes throughout NMS standards. This will ensure that not only is there sufficient, high-quality childcare that meets the needs of children and their families but will also ensure that outcomes for children remain a priority and have a positive impact on all children attending childcare and play settings.

The NMS recognises that all those caring for and working with children and young people have a role to fulfil in promoting children's rights and helping them to reach their potential as individuals.

Mitigation of potential impacts of the proposals have been identified through distinct expert working groups. The sought outcomes of the proposals have been considered and any changes proposed are set against the best interests of the children and the context within which they are being cared for. The changes are supported by relevant additional safeguards and risk assessments as set out by relevant regulations and requirements of registered providers.

High-quality provision is child-centred, inclusive and responsive. It ensures that every baby and child have the right to be heard, the right to play and the right to feel safe and nurtured in an environment that respects their individuality. This is achieved through enabling adults, effective environments and engaging experiences via ECPLC.

The Welsh Government’s commitment to children’s rights, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (UNCRC), underpins high-quality provisions. This means ensuring that:

- Babies and children feel safe and protected from harm (Article 19).
- Their voices are heard and respected in decisions that affect them (Article 12)
- They have time and space to play, explore, and develop at their own pace. (Article 31).
- Their emotional well-being, care, and learning are priorities in nurturing environments.

The table below outlines the [UNCRC articles](#) that are most relevant to the current NMS review 2024-2025.

UNCRC Articles or Optional Protocol	Enhances (X)	Challenges (X)	Explanation
<p>2. Non-discrimination</p> <p>The Convention applies to everyone whatever their race, religion, abilities, whatever they think or say and whatever type of family they come from.</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>The amended NMS will apply to all registered childcare and play settings caring for children from birth up to the age of 12 years.</p> <p>High quality childcare provision can have a positive influence on a child’s development and help them develop to their full potential. Evidence suggests children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit more from quality childcare and that it can help redress both developmental disadvantages and the attainment gap.</p>

		<p>The NMS already contains standards relating to equal opportunities for children and reflects children’s rights. The registered person is responsible for ensuring under standard 16 Equality that equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice is promoted in their registered setting, and they must have an equality policy and meet relevant regulations and standards. Anti-discriminatory legislation and good practice links are promoted within the NMS. We already commit to keeping these under review.</p> <p>The Welsh Government’s core aim 5 based on the UNCRC is that children should be listened to, treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised.</p> <p>Changes to flexibility on ratios for childminders ensure that children will gain the dual benefit of being cared for by a known professional and with their siblings. Parents will be able to choose a child minder that they feel would best meet the needs of their child and care for their children together. This may be particularly significant for parents of disabled children, those with cultural, religious or language preferences and parents who work atypical hours.</p> <p>ECPLC principles will be applied throughout the NMS. These are committed to embedding equality and promoting non-discrimination, taking an inclusive and children’s rights approach into everything we do. They also support children and young people’s participation to ensure the voice of children and parents is accounted for in relation to Additional Learning Needs. They make a significant contribution in mitigating the impact of inequalities, whether it’s racism, poverty, disabilities or other societal factors. Such as, lack of opportunities which can have lasting</p>
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			<p>effects on individuals' lives. The standards support removing barriers to ensure babies and young children are supported to have fulfilling and happy childhoods.</p> <p>The Welsh Government Anti Racist Action Plan (2022) reflects the Welsh Government's commitment to building an inclusive and equitable society for all Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people and communities in Wales.</p> <p>The changes will continue to support children in this area, whatever their backgrounds and links to anti-racism tools and best practice will be included within the NMS if the proposal is approved.</p>
<p>3.Best Interest of the Child</p> <p>All organisations concerned with children should work towards what is best for each child.</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>The best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that affect them. Throughout the review of the NMS, the aim to promote robust safety measures for children has been central consideration, and all decisions have been taken with this in mind. Where there may be any negative impacts related to proposals, mitigations have been carefully considered.</p> <p>The change for NMS standard 13: Suitable Person (CM) and Annex A – NMS Guidance for Child Minder Assistants, means that child minding assistants can be employed without a formal qualification, providing that it is completed within a 6-month timeframe. However, as this could have a potential negative impact on children being cared for if there is a lack of knowledge, we have considered amendments to Standard 13.4 (CM) to mitigate any negative impacts. This means that assistant will not be able to have sole charge of children during this time / unsupervised, until the qualification is obtained.</p>

		<p>Additionally, the changes for the revision of the current child minding ratios under standard 15 (CM) seeks to increase the children to be cared for under the age of 5 years by one child (but not under 18 months old). The intention is that CIW would, through inspections, assess that the needs of the children are being met and if the needs of children require lower ratios, then this must take priority.</p> <p>Proposals for amendments to Standard 13 (DC) Suitable Person, will introduce additional wording to offer clarification on deployment of staff across settings. This will also provide information on instances when settings may include additional volunteers or staff, which are over and above required adult: child ratios, to meet individual support needs. Although this will give flexibility to providers to deploy staff effectively, based on the needs of the children and staff competencies within their setting, this could have potential to have a negative impact on children if not carefully planned and considered dependent upon each setting's individual staffing levels. Therefore, we have mitigated any risks by making it clear that minimum adult: child ratios must still be met and any member of staff who is employed to work with specific children to provide extra support may not be counted within the standard staffing ratios and are employed to enhance the service.</p> <p>The changes for Open Access Play standards seek to amend Standard 10 for First Aid training in such settings to have at least one person at all times with a first aid qualification (full course). This could have a potential negative impact on children if not carefully planned. Therefore, acknowledging the benefits of having qualified first aiders present, to mitigate any risks, we are</p>
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		<p>proposing adopting a risk assessment approach to determine the required numbers of first aid-trained staff. This approach should consider the type of service and activities being provided, the location and size of the provision, and the specific needs of the children who attend, rather than adhering to a prescribed requirement.</p> <p>The Welsh Government's core aim 1 based on the UNCRC is that children should have the best possible start in life providing a basis for their future growth and development.</p> <p>ECPLC principles, which will be embedded throughout the NMS are committed to high-quality provision which is child-centred, inclusive and responsive. It ensures that every baby and child have the right to be heard, the right to play and the right to feel safe and nurtured in an environment that respects their individuality. This is achieved through enabling adults, effective environments and engaging experiences.</p> <p>During pre-consultation engagement with children for the review of 'The Child Minding and Day Care Exceptions (Wales) Order 2010 and the 'National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Regulated Childcare for children up to the age of 12 years' evidence was obtained to ascertain what good childcare looks like. Perspectives were gained from a diverse group of parents and children's views were ascertained (including disabled children and children with ALN) in respect to childcare and how they feel about attending. This has helped us to understand how our decisions affect children, what matters to them and what we need to do to meet their best interests.</p> <p>The amended NMS will focus on the need to properly protect and safeguard</p>
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			<p>children in childcare settings and focus on best outcomes for their well-being. The changes proposed will continue to support what is best for each child.</p>
<p>5. Parental guidance and a child’s evolving capacities</p> <p>Governments should respect the rights and responsibilities of families and direct and guide their children so that, as they grow, they learn to use their rights properly.</p>	X		<p>The review of the NMS aims to ensure children and young people are able to access regulated childcare and play services that are safe, high quality and run by a professional workforce. It aims to provide greater flexibility and clarity in terms of the requirements in the NMS, with the aims of supporting the sustainability and viability of private, third sector and public providers while continuing to prioritise the safety and well-being of the minded children.</p> <p>Parents can be assured that their children are cared for in safe and well-run environments via the availability of clear standards and guidance. Parent/carers and families can therefore have access to choices when choosing childcare so that they can balance their work and family priorities.</p> <p>The review process extensively considers the diverse needs and interests of families and children across Wales. We aim to support families, to enable them to make choices about the regulated childcare and play services that meet their needs.</p> <p>ECPLC principles build on and recognise the importance of working together with parents and other care givers to support every baby and young child to have the best start in life and to feel empowered, cared for and nurtured.</p>

<p>6. Life, Survival and Development</p> <p>All children have the right of life. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>High quality childcare provision can have a positive influence on a child's development and help them develop to their full potential.</p> <p>Regular reviews of the NMS play an essential role in helping to ensure that children are cared for in a safe, secure and appropriate environments.</p> <p>The Welsh Government's core aim 3 based on the UNCRC is that children should enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation.</p> <p>ECPLC principles support children in having the right to grow, learn and play in a happy, healthy, safe and inclusive environment.</p>
<p>12. Respect for the views of the child.</p> <p>Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>As part of the review, we have gained perspectives from a diverse group of parents and children (including disabled children and children with ALN) in respect to childcare and how they feel about attending.</p> <p>This has helped us to understand how our decisions affect children, what matters to them and what we need to do to meet their best interests. We worked with Children in Wales through focus groups and framed questions to ascertain what good childcare looks like. In assessing impact of any changes to the NMS at consultation we have considered the broad topics that emerged from the findings of the exercise.</p> <p>ECPLC principles support children's voices to be heard and respected in decisions that affect them.</p> <p>The NMS requires providers to have procedures in place for children / parents to complain should they be unhappy with their care / service. All</p>

			<p>parents who use childcare and play services within Wales, should be signposted to the NMS as a good practice guide.</p> <p>An easy read consultation document was available to support sharing the document wide with parents in seeking children and young people views on the proposals.</p>
<p>18. Parental responsibilities and state assistance</p> <p>Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children and should always consider what is best for each child. Governments must support parents by providing services to support them, especially if both parents work.</p>	X		<p>The provision of childcare plays a crucial role in the lives of Welsh families by enabling parents and carers to access work and training opportunities, which in turn can assist families in moving out of poverty.</p> <p>The review of the NMS aims to support the sustainability and viability of private, third sector and public providers while continuing to prioritise the safety and well-being of minded children. By ensuring the National Minimum Standards are amended and fit for purpose, parents can be assured that their children are cared for in a safe and secure environment.</p> <p>Eligible parents that use registered childcare can access settings registered to deliver Welsh government funded schemes such as Flying Start and Childcare Offer for Wales. In addition, they can use Tax Free Childcare or Universal Credit Childcare schemes which can support them financially, and in having access to choices when choosing childcare so that they can balance their work and family priorities and find a setting that best meets the needs of their child.</p>
<p>19. Protection from violence, abuse and neglect.</p> <p>Governments should ensure that children are properly</p>	X		<p>Welsh Government monitor how providers care for and safeguard children through Care Inspectorate Wales registration and inspection functions. As part of these processes, they consider the care given by</p>

<p>cared for, and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.</p>			<p>providers and the well-being and development of children. Providers are expected to meet the Child minding and Daycare Regulations as well as the National Minimum Standards set out by Welsh Government, including safeguarding training and reporting obligations. These measures are fundamental to ensuring children are appropriately protected.</p> <p>Welsh Government expects all providers to adhere to the 'Working Together to Safeguard People: Code of Safeguarding Practice' to ensure children are safeguarded by all childcare providers across Wales.</p> <p>In line with this commitment, standard 20 of the National Minimum Standards for children up to the age of 12 years identifies the intended outcomes, that children are safeguarded from harm, abuse and neglect and parents are confident that all possible steps to safeguard children are taken and that safeguarding of the child is first priority and is everyone's responsibility. This standard also supports childcare settings in developing their own safeguarding policies in line with Wales Safeguarding procedures and accessing training which is relevant to their childcare role. In addition to this Standard 13.4 of the NMS identifies that all paid staff receive regular one-to-one supervisions which encourages them to raise any safeguarding concerns.</p> <p>The Welsh Government's core aim 3 based on the UNCRC is for children to enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation.</p> <p>The Welsh Government's core aim 6 based on the UNCRC is that children have a safe home and a community</p>
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			<p>which supports physical and emotional well-being.</p> <p>The review of the NMS will play an essential role in helping to ensure that children are cared for in a safe, secure and appropriate environment.</p> <p>ECPLC principles support babies and children to feel safe and protected from harm.</p>
<p>23.Children with a disability.</p> <p>Children who have any kind of disability should have special care and support so that they can lead full and independent lives.</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>The NMS review will support with clarifications on effective deployment of staff to meet children’s needs, supporting continuity of care and sustainability of the sector, and could allow settings who are currently struggling to remain operational as well as a focus on developing the child’s voice throughout NMS standards. This will ensure that not only is there sufficient, high-quality childcare that meets the needs of children and their families but will also ensure that outcomes for children remain a priority and have a positive impact on all children attending childcare and play settings.</p> <p>ECPLC principles are committed to embedding equality and promoting non-discrimination, taking an inclusive approach into everything, we do. They also support children and young people’s participation to ensure the voice of children and parents are accounted for in relation to Additional Learning Needs.</p> <p>Many settings are able to offer Tax-free Childcare or Universal Credit Childcare schemes at the same time as the Childcare Offer, as long as no double funding of hours occurs. Tax free Childcare or Universal Credit are available to all parents including those of disabled children up to 1st September after their 16th birthday.</p>

			<p>Additionally, settings offering the Childcare Offer may also be able to access the Childcare Offer Additional Support Grant to better support the disabled children or children with ALN of eligible parents. This is funding that goes directly to childcare settings to support identified children to enable the setting to provide for their needs, for example specialist equipment or 1:1 staffing.</p> <p>Providers across Wales who provide care to children with individual needs must work in line with standard 4 of the NMS which identifies that each child's individual needs, including any children with disabilities or additional needs (including additional learning needs) are planned and provided for.</p> <p>The Welsh Government has published a parents' guide to rights under the 'Additional Learning Needs (ALN) System and SNAP Cymru provide independent advice and guidance on early years help for parents of young children who have or may have ALN.</p> <p>Flying Start, the Welsh Government's flagship programme, places early identification of need at its core. This initiative provides integrated support to families living in Flying Start areas.</p> <p>The review of the NMS will continue to support disabled children, and those who have additional care and learning needs.</p>
<p>24. Health and Health Services</p> <p>Children have the right to good quality health care and to clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so that they will stay healthy. Rich countries</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>Access to high quality, safe and secure childcare and play improves children's physical and mental health and well-being. Registered childcare and playwork settings that provide food to children, must ensure that any meals and / or snacks that children receive are nutritionally balanced and line with the</p>

<p>should help poorer countries achieve this.</p>			<p>Welsh Government's Food and nutrition guidance for childcare providers</p> <p>In line with this commitment, Standard 12 of the NMS identifies that children are provided with regular drinks and food in adequate quantities for their needs and that fresh drinking water is available for children at all times. In addition, Standard 22 focuses on children being cared for in an environment that is safe, secure and suitable for their purpose, providing a rich opportunity for play.</p> <p>Welsh Government can monitor how organisations promote children's health and nutrition needs through Care Inspectorate Wales registrations and inspections. As part of these processes, they consider the care given by providers, the food and water provided to them and the environment in which they are cared for.</p> <p>Eligible registered providers can apply for capital funding for improvements to their settings environment to benefit the children attending via the Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme.</p> <p>ECPLC principles supports settings to work in a systemic way with other partners such as health, education, third sector and children's services through the NYTH/ NEST framework. This helps to support early years services, such as having access to health and social care provision to protect and support their journey to be happy and healthy. Additionally, parents and children are supported to access health provision and support programmes such as maternity provision which offers families early information on public health issues including healthy living and early parenting. Every Child Wales, the replacement for Bump, Baby and Beyond provides information for parents</p>
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			<p>to support them from pregnancy through the first 1,000 days and early years of childhood, to make the best decisions for their health and that of their child or children. The Healthy Child Wales Programme sets out what planned contact children, and their families can expect from their health boards, from maternity and health visiting services.</p> <p>The review of the NMS will continue to ensure that children continue to have the right to good quality health care and to clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment at registered settings so that they will stay healthy.</p>
<p>28. Right to education.</p> <p>Children have a right to an education. Discipline in schools should respect children’s human dignity. Primary education should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this.</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>Standard 7 supports opportunities for play and learning across all childcare settings in Wales. This standard focuses on children having a range of experiences, including freely chosen, unstructured and self-directed play, that contributes to their emotional, physical, social, intellectual, language and creative development.</p> <p>The Welsh Government’s core aim 2 based on the UNCRC is that children have access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities, including acquisition of essential personal and social skills.</p> <p>Registered Childcare providers across Wales will providing funded nursery education follow Curriculum for Wales. This applies to all children from three to sixteen years old, including those in nurseries and early years settings. The curriculum focuses on five key developmental pathways rooted in child development: Belonging, Communication, Exploration, Physical Development, and Well-Being. It also emphasises the importance of learning by doing and engaging in authentic, purposeful experiences.</p>

			<p>For those children who are below the age of 3 years old, childcare settings will follow the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) approach, which is an integrated approach to education and Childcare. ECPLC aligns with the broader curriculum for Wales, emphasising holistic development and well-being. It focuses on a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development through play and learning experiences. Guidance provided to support learning and development from birth onwards is aligned with the Curriculum for Wales ethos to support smooth transitions for children.</p> <p>ECPLC principles support the provision of consistent education for children through high-quality play-based childcare and education opportunities for all children, allowing them to thrive.</p> <p>The proposals set out as part of the NMS review focuses on the development of a professional, highly skilled and valued workforce which in turn will help to support children's education as well as focusing on aligning standards to the ECPLC principles through outcomes and the child's voice, with links to best practice documents to further support high quality childcare and play.</p>
<p>30. Children from minority or indigenous groups.</p> <p>Children have a right to learn and use the language and customs of their families, whether these are shared by the majority of people in the country or not.</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>The Welsh Government's core aim 5 based on the UNCRC is that children should be listened to, treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised. Proposed changes to flexibility for childminder ratios ensure that parents will be able to choose a child minder that they feel would best meet the needs of their child and care for their children together. This may be particularly significant for parents of disabled children, those with cultural, religious or language preferences and parents who work atypical hours.</p>

			<p>The Welsh Government Anti Racist Action Plan (2022) reflects the Welsh Government’s commitment to building an inclusive and equitable society for all Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people and communities in Wales. In line with this commitment, standard 4.4 of the NMS identifies that the needs and preferences of individual children (including those from minority ethnic communities) in relation to their home language(s), intended medium of education (e.g., Welsh or English) and their social, cultural and religious practices are understood and catered for.</p> <p>The changes proposed and updates to the NMS will continue to support children whatever their backgrounds. Links to anti-racism tools and best practice will also be included as part of the proposal</p>
<p>31. Leisure, Play and Culture</p> <p>All children have the right to relax and play, and to join a wide range of activities.</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>The Ministerial Review of Play Report (2023) recognises “Playing is central to children’s physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing. For children themselves, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives. They value time, freedom and quality places to play.”</p> <p>Childcare and play settings provide children with various opportunities to play and Standard 7 of the NMS supports opportunities for play and learning across all registered childcare settings in Wales. This standard focuses on children having a range of experiences, including freely chosen, unstructured and self-directed play, that contributes to their emotional, physical, social, intellectual, language and creative development.</p>

			<p>The Welsh Government's core aim 4 based on the UNCRC is for children to have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities.</p> <p>The proposals set out in section 1 of the NMS review focuses on the development of a professional, highly skilled and valued workforce which in turn will help to support children's play and activities.</p> <p>A proportionate approach to Open Access Play aims to support the sustainability of Open Access Play which will ensure there is available services of this nature available for children to access.</p> <p>ECPLC principles support children in having the time and space to play, explore and develop at their own pace.</p>
<p>34. Sexual Exploitation</p> <p>The Government should protect children from sexual abuse.</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>Welsh Government monitors how providers care for and safeguard children through Care Inspectorate Wales functions of Registrations and Inspections. As part of these processes, they consider the care given by providers and the well-being and development of children. Providers are expected to meet the Child minding and Daycare Regulations as well as the National Minimum Standards set out by Welsh Government, including safeguarding training and reporting obligations. These measures are fundamental to ensuring children are appropriately protected.</p> <p>Welsh Government expects all providers to adhere to the 'Working Together to Safeguard People: Code of Safeguarding Practice' to ensure children are safeguarded by all childcare providers across Wales.</p> <p>In line with this commitment, the outcomes for Standard 20 of the NMS</p>

		<p>are for children to be safeguarded from harm, abuse and neglect, and parents are confident that all possible steps to safeguard children are taken and that safeguarding children is first priority and everyone's responsibility. This standard also supports childcare settings in developing their own safeguarding policies in line with Wales Safeguarding procedures and accessing training which is relevant to their childcare role. In addition to this Standard 13.4 of the NMS identifies that all paid staff receive regular one-to-one supervisions which encourages them to raise any safeguarding concerns.</p> <p>The Welsh Government's core aim 3 based on the UNCRC is for children to enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation.</p> <p>The review of the NMS will play an essential role in helping to ensure that children are cared for in a safe, secure and appropriate environment.</p>
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- *Consider whether any EU Citizens Rights (as referenced in the Equality Impact Assessment) relate to young people up to the age of 18.*

Eligible individuals falling within the scope of the Citizens Rights Agreements will have broadly the same continued entitlements to work, study and access public services and benefits. EU Citizens rights may apply with respect to access to social security systems – these include benefits, access to education, housing and access to healthcare, in respect children who were lawfully resident in the UK by 31 December 2020. This proposal will not affect these rights.

EU citizens with settled or pre-settled status, if eligible can register with HMRC to receive payments via the Tax-Free Childcare scheme and DWP so that eligible parents can use the Universal Credit Childcare scheme. EU citizens with settled or pre-settled status will have access to these schemes in line with the other eligibility requirements.

4. Ministerial advice and decision

In formulating Ministerial advice in respect of the consultation on the [National Minimum Standards \(NMS\) for Regulated Childcare for children up to 12 years](#)' review, officials have paid due regard to the rights of children as set out in the UNCRC. Evidence shows that high-quality early year's provision is crucial to the outcomes for children, and it is anticipated that any proposed changes to the NMS will have a positive impact on children and young people by ensuring they are able to access sufficient childcare. Our ambition for a professional and sustainable workforce is centred on the understanding that by reviewing and making amendments to the NMS, this will help to relieve some of the pressure on providers by supporting them to meet the necessary requirements and continue to support the sustainability of the sector. This in turn, will have a positive influence on outcomes for children and their development, helping them to achieve their full potential.

Ministerial advice regarding the changes to the NMS will confirm that we have considered the UNCRC when developing this policy. The accompanying advice will summarise the overall conclusion, as per the assessment, that the strategy will have a positive impact on children and young people with all unintended consequences having been considered and / or mitigated.

The CRIA has been authorised by the Deputy Director for Early Years, Childcare and Play, and will be integrated into ministerial advice. The policy impact analysis will be influenced by the consultation responses, in particular the impact of the policy on the children and young people using childcare and play services across Wales.

5. Publication of the CRIA

The draft CRIA was published with the consultation on 17 September 2025. We have presented the findings of the consultation to the Minister for Children and Social Care, outlining the next steps for implementing the changes.

This CRIA has been revised and updated following consultation closure, analysis of responses, and Ministerial approval has been given to its publication alongside the Summary of Responses.

6. Communicating with Children and Young People

The Welsh Government used its digital channels and existing networks across all relevant policy areas to raise awareness of the consultation and to engage a diverse range of people. Representatives from a range of organisations who took part in pre-consultation events and working groups were called upon to support the consultation process, ensuring it was publicised with the childcare and play workforce across the sector and disseminated to parents and children.

This CRIA document has been updated following the outcome of the consultation and if additional impacts are identified through our implementation work, then there will be a need to engage widely with those working in and accessing childcare and playwork settings, including children and young people and this CRIA will be reviewed. Outcomes to the consultation have been shared with all our stakeholders.

The Welsh Government will continue to work closely with the sector (including working with sector representative bodies and directly with providers, local authorities and other key stakeholders) including children and young people to ensure that they are informed of developments during the implementation phase. Considering this, wherever possible, steps will be put in place to ensure accessible information is provided.

As part of this work and ongoing engagement we will consider the impact of any potential long term changes to the NMS on the safety and quality of care provided. Any proposals developed have been in conjunction with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) who inspect registered settings and members of the CWLWM childcare consortium and Play Wales who represent childcare and playwork providers.

7. Monitoring and Review

At each stage of policy development, the impact of the policy will be assessed and reviewed. The CRIA is a living document and has been updated following the consultation. We have identified the impacts we set out in the draft Impact Assessment and reflected whether there are any further unintended consequences. We have used the findings from the consultation, including responses to the question which seeks the views of the impact on children's rights to review the CRIA, and make amendments to the evidence of impact accordingly in respect of how the proposals may affect children. This CRIA is published with any updates to the evidence of impact, and we will continue to look for opportunities for supporting children's rights as we move into implementation. Our intention is to keep the NMS under review and update as policy and legislation develops over the coming years. Reviews of the NMS supported by relevant impact assessments, ensures that children's needs remain central to policy development. These processes provide evidence-based analysis that informs decision-making and promotes continuous improvement in childcare and play.

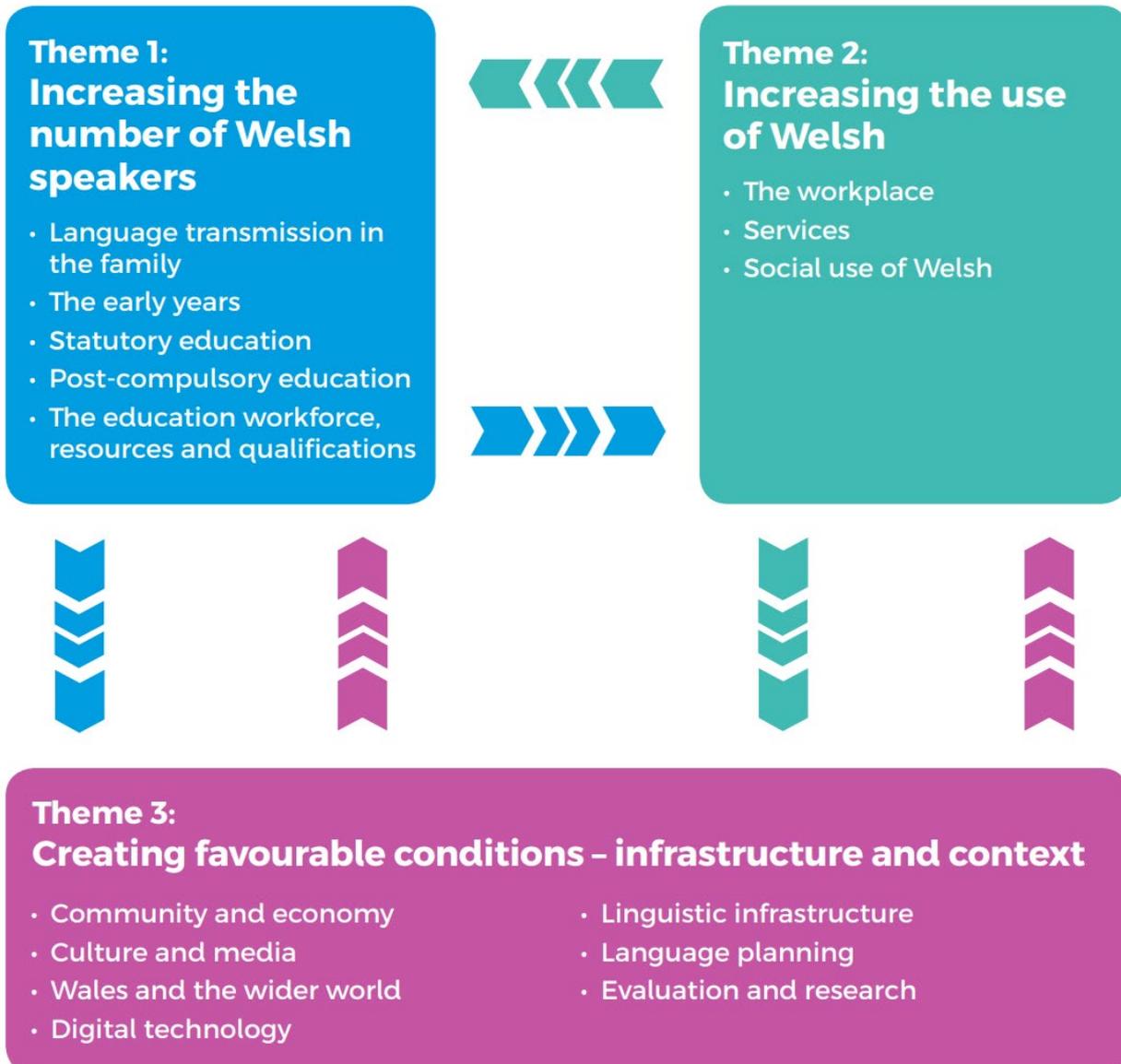
B. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Cymraeg 2050 is our national strategy for increasing the number of Welsh speakers to a million by 2050.

The Welsh Government is fully committed to the new strategy, with the target of a million speakers included in its Programme for Government. A thriving Welsh language is also included in one of the 7 well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

We also have a statutory obligation to fully consider the effects of our work on the Welsh Language. This means that any Welsh Government policy should consider how our policies affect the language and those who speak it.

The *Cymraeg 2050* strategy has three interrelated themes:



The headings under each theme outline the scope of activities that can affect the language.

Introduction

The Welsh Government's vision is to see the Welsh language thrive, with an increase in the number of people who both speak and use the language in their daily lives. Both this strategy and the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act state that the Welsh language is a strategic priority for the Welsh Government.

Access to bilingual and Welsh medium childcare and playwork gives children the opportunity to socialise and play through the medium of Welsh. Welsh medium childcare and play opportunities also supports Welsh medium education as children who attend Welsh medium childcare are more likely to choose, and progress to Welsh medium schools than those attending English medium provision. Welsh medium out of school childcare opportunities can also support children's Welsh medium language development.

We work with our partners and stakeholders to develop practical solutions to barriers parents may face in accessing the childcare they need to be able to work, including ensuring sufficiency of Welsh-medium and bilingual childcare. Expanding Welsh-medium provision in the early years is one of the key aims of our Welsh Language Strategy, *Cymraeg 2050*.

The Welsh Government's vision for a million Welsh speakers by 2050, clearly identifies the Early Years and childhood as key focus areas for meeting this target. It highlights the importance of the early years sector as a point of early entry to immersion education, and to increased demand for Welsh-medium education. The Welsh Government's long-term aim being "for our early years provision to reach a position where children under five have had sufficient contact with the Welsh language to be able to start on their journey towards fluency".

All the changes proposed integrate the drive to support high quality, accessible childcare which is inspected by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and supported by the NMS to ensure compliance with the regulations.

Changes

Welsh Government does not anticipate any adverse impacts on the Welsh language as a subsequent result of any proposed changes to the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Regulated Childcare for children up to 12 years. The requirements of the NMS in relation to Welsh language are likely to remain unchanged, or to be strengthened. The proposed changes will support registered childcare and playwork providers in meeting the NMS standards, remove unnecessary barriers and support the ongoing sustainability of the sector. These will include Welsh medium settings, bilingual and English medium settings, all of whom will need to meet outcomes aligned to quality and inclusion, and the need to have regard to the Welsh language.

Direct elements of the proposal such as providing flexibility across the sector in relation to qualification and ratio requirements demonstrates a direct link to theme 2 "*increasing the use of Welsh*" as it is concerned with sustainability of the sector with a strong focus on addressing current workforce challenges.

Particular examples of this are:

- **Open Access Playwork Standards** - Creating a set of proportionate Open Access Playwork standards and providing flexibility to the prescribed qualification requirements for first aid subject to risk assessments being undertaken alongside making slight amendments to the percentages of staff who hold particular qualifications. By proposing a more proportionate approach for this type of childcare there will be positive effects in terms of cost, recruitment, and employability with an overall aim to prevent a decline in registered numbers and work towards the goal to increase the number of registered services and provide more children with access to safe play areas staffed by qualified individuals, which are currently unavailable.
- **NMS Guidance for Child Minder Assistants - Standard 13: Suitable Person (CM) and Annex A** - Providing flexibility for child minding assistants will help maintain continuity in the child-minding sector. The proposal means that child minding assistants can be employed initially without a formal qualification and 'work towards' the required qualification within a 6-month timeframe. However, a caveat has been considered with amendments to Standard 13.4(CM) that child minding assistants cannot be left alone in sole charge of children until the qualification is obtained. This will help to mitigate any risks associated with the assistant being unqualified for a short period of time following employment. This amendment to allow child minding assistants to be employed without a formal qualification but be working towards a qualification will help to ease pressure on recruitment. Additionally, we intend to consult on the maximum length of time a child minder assistant can be left in sole charge of children being up to no more than two hours in a day. This will support child minders in managing their practice by enabling them to appoint an assistant to support and enhance the provision for children. Both of these changes will ensure that child minders can become prosperous businesses in their own right and continue in employment.
- **Ratios (Child Minding): Standard 15 (CM)** – Revising current child minding ratios for children under 5-years-old to increase one child under 5 years (but not under 18 months), to be classed as over the age of 5-years during the summer holidays prior to this for the purposes of ratios relevant to child minder will help to provide flexibility. Additionally, where children who are due to start full-time statutory school / education in September as well as children aged 3-5 years who attend an educational provision or a combination of an educational provision and wrap-around childcare within school hours at another setting for five or more hours per day, they may also be classed as over the age of 5-years for the purposes of the ratios relevant to child minders, which will also help to provide further flexibility. Both these changes are intended to help support the sustainability of the child minding sector by addressing the evident recent decline and offer flexibility for adult to child ratios for children under 5 years.

The consideration of specific proposals to support flexibility across the childcare and playwork sector will help to address current workforce recruitment and retention challenges. This includes Welsh medium provision, where the workforce plays a key role in supporting children to take their first steps towards bilingualism.

Describe and explain the impact of the proposals on the Welsh language and explain how you will address these impacts in order to improve outcomes for the Welsh language.

The Welsh Government's vision to expand Welsh-medium provision in the early years is one of the key aims of our Welsh Language Strategy, *Cymraeg 2050*. However, this depends on the sector being sustainable and on there being a sufficiently sized and qualified workforce. The childcare and play sectors are facing recruitment and retention issues and it is recognised nationally that recruiting and retaining staff including those who are Welsh speakers to work with children in the childcare and playwork sector is an ongoing challenge. These issues are exacerbated for Welsh medium provision given the smaller pool of potential recruits who have Welsh language skills. This may be particularly evident if they have difficulties finding sufficient Welsh speaking staff to meet the requirements set out in the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare.

The consultation for the NMS review 2025 is structured into topic areas which include questions of proposed changes and also engagement questions to support future policy development (proposals can be found within Section 1 of the IIA).

The consultation questions gathered views about how the changes proposed may affect both the Welsh language and Welsh medium provision and the impact this could have along with any mitigation of negative impacts.

The proposals set out in relation to Open Access Playwork and NMS standard 13 and 15 relating to qualifications and ratios for child minders and their assistants will provide flexibility across the sector. They are also intended to support and address current workforce recruitment and retention challenges which in turn will have a positive impact on the sector, including that of Welsh medium provision. Other proposed changes such as amending the structure and presentation of the NMS will include presenting the document in a HTML web version to enhance accessibility and support easier navigation for users. This online version will be available in both Welsh and English which will support those who wish to access the information through the medium of Welsh, including providers and parents. Information already provided on the NMS being minimum standards which are expected to be exceeded, will be strengthened by including links to guidance and best practice toolkits on how to achieve a good or excellent provision.

The proposal to provide a proportionate standalone set of standards for 'Open Access Play' settings will also support a more balanced approach to registration and inspection for these settings. This may increase the amount of registered open access provision, which may lead to an increase in the availability of registered Welsh medium or bilingual open access play.

The proposals will support the sector, including a number of Welsh medium settings across Wales, such as 'Cylchoedd Meithrin' to remain operational. 'Cylchoedd Meithrin' and services provided by Mudiad Meithrin and other key stakeholders support the national strategy *Cymraeg 2050* by providing Welsh-language nursery care, developing opportunities for children throughout Wales to receive Welsh-medium early years care and services. These settings formalise mainstreaming the Welsh language and provide opportunities to maintain and strengthen the role of the Welsh-medium sector in the future. In addition, early exposure to the Welsh language and opportunities can support children

in settings across the early years sector develop their Welsh language skills and expand opportunities for future generations.

Early years settings are able to offer the language '**Croesi'r Bont**' immersion method which is used to introduce Welsh to young children who attend. Additionally, play activities conducted bilingually and in Welsh encourages and supports children to develop confidence in communicating in Welsh. Within this environment, children are able to develop their language skills through a well-rounded curriculum that includes opportunities for free and structured play, alongside an immersive language programme.

- Welsh Government are committed to the actions in our Welsh Language Strategy, Cymraeg 2050 plan and are focused on supporting expanded Welsh-medium childcare for families across Wales. This includes the following actions:
- Welsh Government allocate funding to CWLWM to support the Childcare and play sector to increase the availability of Welsh medium provision. This includes investing in the workforce and building new settings.
- Welsh Government allocate funding to local authorities to support the Childcare and play sector via the Children and Communities Grant. The purpose of the funding includes addressing the gaps identified within Childcare Sufficiency Assessments (CSAs) and can be used flexibly to meet the needs of local communities. One of the areas local authorities are encouraged to give special consideration to are families wishing to access provision through the medium of Welsh. A review of the CSA process is undertaken to gain a better understanding in addressing current gaps and challenges in childcare provision across Wales. This helps to improve identification of demand and supply of childcare including Welsh-medium provision required to meet the needs of families in the future.
- Welsh Government officials work closely with Childcare Leads within local authorities to ensure that Welsh Medium expansion plans are supported.
- Welsh Government funding is provided to Mudiad Meithrin as part of CWLWM funding to support the growth of the Welsh-medium workforce and through a 'Cam Wrth Gam' Welsh childcare qualifications programme for staff in Cylchoedd Meithrin or other Welsh medium childcare can be funded to undertake level 3 and level 5 training.
- Through Welsh Government support, Mudiad Meithrin offers grants through 'SaS' (Sefydlu a Symud / Set up and Success) to expand existing settings and support the set-up of new provision.
- Welsh Government support early years settings to offer the language '**Croesi'r Bont**' immersion method which offers language immersion support for new settings

and is used to specifically support Welsh language skills within the workforce and introduce Welsh to young children who attend.

- The Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme is available to all registered childcare and play providers including Cylchoedd Meithrin. This programme will continue over the next three years until March 2028 and helps to ensure that the childcare sector in Wales is strengthened and supported and has a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh medium provisions.

Our ambition for a professional and sustainable workforce is centred on the understanding that by reviewing and making amendments to the NMS, this will help to relieve some of the pressure on providers by supporting them to meet the necessary requirements, and continue to support the sustainability of the sector, which will in turn will have a positive influence on outcomes for children and their development, helping them to achieve their full potential.

The proposals support our ambition for a professional and sustainable workforce for those in the childcare and playwork workforce with a long-term vision of supporting and developing the employment of staff across settings and allowing them to enter and remain within the childcare workforce. Individuals working in childcare and play settings across Wales have an increasing role to play in providing opportunities for children to learn and use Welsh and the proposals enable us to focus our policy ambitions more clearly for the development of a workforce that can support Welsh speakers of the future.

The consultation was taken forward to recognise and value the views of those who engage in the consultation process.

The consultation posed some questions in relation to impact upon the Welsh language if the proposals were taken forward. This is a summary of that feedback.

Most respondents viewed that the proposed changes to the National Minimum Standards (NMS) do not negatively impact the Welsh language. Many believe there is potential for positive impact, particularly where settings already value or use Welsh, or where changes could indirectly support Welsh medium access.

Main Positive Impacts Identified

1. Increased exposure and opportunities to use Welsh

- Allowing a wider mix of ages may increase interaction between Welsh speaking and non-Welsh speaking children.
- More opportunities for incidental and informal Welsh use (songs, greetings, simple phrases).
- HTML based bilingual NMS versions could make Welsh more accessible.

2. Stronger visibility and normalisation of Welsh

- Bilingual documentation and clearer expectations about implementing Welsh.
- Embedding ECPLC principles supports bilingualism.

- Including Welsh terminology (e.g., cynefin, cymreig, iaith) within standards helps raise the profile.

3. Improved access to Welsh medium childcare

- Increased flexibility in ratios and wrap around care could help parents choose Welsh medium provision, especially in rural areas where travel is a barrier.
- Child minder flexibility seen as key to enabling attendance at Welsh medium childcare and schools.

4. Workforce development opportunities

- Many welcome training, resources, and more accessible Welsh learning pathways (e.g. Camau, Croesi'r bont, Welsh Promise).
- More opportunities for staff to develop confidence in using Welsh in daily practice.

5. Inclusion and person-centred practice

- Supporting Welsh language is seen as part of wider inclusive communication practices.
- Children who communicate in Welsh—or in other languages/methods—benefit from an environment that supports their preferred communication style.

Main Concerns & Potential Negative Impacts

1. Workforce capacity and recruitment

- Difficulty finding Welsh speaking staff, especially in rural areas or out of school care.
- Qualification requirements (if applied across whole settings rather than by provision type) could disadvantage Welsh medium provision relying on bilingual teaching assistants.

2. Uneven access to Welsh learning opportunities

- Courses often inaccessible (weekday, limited availability).
- Training not consistently available in Welsh.
- Risk of overwhelming providers if requirements are too rigid, especially where Welsh competence is currently low.

3. Rural practicalities affecting Welsh medium access

- A rigid "2-hour unsupervised assistant" rule could reduce ability to collect from rural Welsh medium schools, unintentionally reducing access to Welsh medium early years education.
- Wrap around rules may unintentionally push families toward English medium childcare where Welsh medium options are not geographically convenient.

4. Concerns about misleading provision

- Some settings advertise as "Welsh" or "bilingual" without sufficient Welsh speaking staff. This may undermine parental trust and Welsh medium standards.

5. Sustainability issues

- Some fear that staffing/qualification requirements may threaten the viability of Welsh medium or bilingual settings already struggling with resources.

Opportunities to Enhance Positive Effects

Respondents suggested:

- ✓ Stronger alignment with Cymraeg 2050.
- ✓ Clearer guidance on the Welsh Active Offer and what constitutes bilingual or Welsh medium provision.
- ✓ Embedding bilingual resources, signage, and play based Welsh materials within NMS.
- ✓ Case studies to show realistic, proportionate ways non fluent practitioners can use Welsh.
- ✓ Increased training availability and free or low cost Welsh lessons for childcare staff.
- ✓ More peripatetic Welsh language support staff.

Opportunities to Mitigate Negative Effects

Suggestions include:

- Expand assistant unsupervised time from 2 to 3 hours in exceptional circumstances to support rural Welsh medium school pickups.
- Adjust ratio rules to better support wrap around care for Welsh medium part time provision.
- Provide bilingual training, qualifications, and support materials consistently across Wales.
- Ensure expectations around Welsh use are proportionate and achievable for English speaking staff.
- Support recruitment and retention of Welsh speaking staff.

Summary

No major negative impacts were identified by most respondents.

However, significant opportunities exist to:

- reinforce commitment to Welsh,
- improve accessibility of Welsh resources and training,
- remove practical barriers for rural and Welsh medium settings, and
- provide clearer guidance to ensure Welsh is embedded meaningfully—not burdensomely—into daily practice.