



# Independent Review of Childminding

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## Executive Summary

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The number of registered childminders has declined sharply in recent years, at a time when the number of children's day care services has increased. The decline is driven by a relatively high and steadily increasing number of childminders leaving the industry each year accompanied by a low and rapidly falling number of individuals registering as new childminders.
- 1.2 The aim of this independent review is to understand the reasons for the decline in the number of childminders in Wales, and to produce some recommendations aimed at attracting more childminders into the industry and to encourage more of those already registered as childminders to stay in the industry.
- 1.3 A mixed-methods evidence gathering approach was adopted, which drew heavily on primary data gathered through interviews and surveys conducted with childminders and wider stakeholders. Evidence was also drawn from secondary information sources including published literature and statistical data available from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) reports, Self-Assessment of Service Statement (SASS) data, and Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) parent survey data.

### 2. Review of data sources

- 2.1 The review of available data confirmed the rapid decline in registered childminders. The data outlines that the number of childminders who can deliver Welsh language provision has declined at a particularly sharp rate in recent years.
- 2.2 The data also outlines that registered childminders are more prevalent in urban areas and less prevalent in the more socio-economically deprived areas of Wales.
- 2.3 As well as identified national trends in childminder registrations and cancellations in recent years, the data review also outlined some shortfalls in the availability of consistent time series data on a local level, and gaps in data relating to the characteristics, including age, gender and ethnicity, of the childminding workforce on a national and local level.

### **3. Literature review**

- 3.1 The review of literature identified a number of benefits of childminding, including the opportunity to deliver a service from home and being able to offer a more intimate level of personalised care for children across a range of ages.
- 3.2 The literature review also identified key challenges faced by childminders including dealing with paperwork and bureaucratic processes. Other challenges identified in the literature included the long hours worked by childminders in return for relatively low pay and the challenge of accommodating the demand for childcare during certain times of the day whilst also complying with National Minimum Standards (NMS) staffing ratios.
- 3.3 The literature review also outlined that childminders often feel undervalued and underappreciated by government, parents, and other practitioners working in the early years sector. The current cost of living crisis has generated increased uncertainty amongst many childminders about the financial viability of their business. The recent COVID – 19 pandemic left many childminders feeling isolated, lonely and cut off from their informal childminder network which many turn to for support.

### **4. Views of parents accessing childminding services**

- 4.1 Parents interviewed noted what they considered to be the main benefits of accessing a childminding service. These included the home from home environment of childminding settings and the fact that their child was being cared for by one individual whom they trusted.

### **5. Views of childminders and wider stakeholders**

- 5.1 Many of the views relating to the benefits and challenges of childminding identified in the literature review, were echoed by childminders and wider stakeholders who took part in the research'.

### **Challenges**

- 5.2 Challenges associated with the demands of paperwork, digital literacy (or lack of) and the need to meet CIW inspection requirements were amongst the most common challenges identified. It was also noted that these challenges have pushed some childminders out of the industry sooner than they may have planned. Additional challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, also accelerated the rate at which childminders cancelled their registrations during 2020 and 2021.
- 5.3 The findings outline that challenges such as the costs associated with training and registration have prevented or put off some individuals from becoming a childminder and therefore contributed to the increasing decline in the number of new childminder registrations recorded since 2018.
- 5.4 The findings also indicate that feeling underappreciated and undervalued is a factor that encourages some childminders to leave the profession, as well as deterring some others from joining.
- 5.5 Childminders often find accommodating the demand for childcare during certain parts of the day (e.g., before and after school and during lunch times) while also complying with NMS staff to child ratios, challenging. Obtaining planning permission to enable childminding services to accommodate more children has also been identified as a challenge for settings in some areas. These challenges limit the ability of some childminders to meet the high demand for childcare they encounter.

- 5.6 Some childminders face financial issues and business instability. However, take up of business support services already available and tailored to childminders, appears to be relatively low.
- 5.7 In some local authority areas, childminders are not considered suitable to deliver government-funded programmes such as Flying Start and Early Education. This can lead to other knock-on challenges for childminders including trying to accommodate demand for half day provision as opposed to full day, and accommodating wrap around care including transport to and from other settings.
- 5.8 Considering the likely increase in demand for childcare that will follow in the wake of the Programme for Government commitment to expand the availability of funded childcare in Wales, the findings presented in this report indicate that not only is there a need to increase the overall number of childminders operating in the childcare sector, but that those already operating, need to be supported to enable them to accommodate more childcare places.

## 6. Recommendations

- 6.1 The findings presented in this review outline that a sharp and continued decline in the number of registered childminders is taking place at a time when demand for childcare is likely to increase. To reverse this declining trend, this report makes a number of recommendations aimed at addressing the challenges that push some childminders out of the profession and deter others from entering it.

### Supporting new childminder registrations.

**Recommendation 1** – The Welsh Government, working in partnership with PACEY Cymru and local authorities, should consider a range of communication activities to help promote childminding as a career option to students and new parents.

**Recommendation 2**- CIW should review the current childminding application process with a view to making it, where possible, more streamlined and easier for applicants to complete.

**Recommendation 3** – CIW should continue to work with PACEY Cymru to support individuals with guidance, advice and training to enable them to complete the registration process as quickly as possible.

**Recommendation 4** – The Welsh Government should support Business Wales to build on the 2020-2021 Childcare Business Support Grant programme, by administering a permanent grant programme to support entry into childminding. Business Wales and the Welsh Government should encourage local authorities and PACEY Cymru to market and promote the availability of the grant to potential new childminders.

**Recommendation 5** – Further guidance and funding should be provided to newly established childminders to enable them to access the initial training they may require as well as support to deal with the startup administration tasks and costs. This should be coordinated by the Welsh Government working in partnership with PACEY Cymru and Business Wales who already offer support with these areas

**Recommendation 6** – Local authorities need to ensure that all registered childminders are included on their local childcare setting directories. Local authorities may also need to increase the rate at which they actively promote childminders, particularly newly established childminders in their area.

**Recommendation 7** – Given the particularly sharp decline in the number of childminders who can deliver Welsh language provision, CIW, local authorities and the Welsh Government need to work with PACEY to place particular focus on attracting new childminders into the profession who can deliver their services through the medium of Welsh.

## **Supporting increased retention of childminders**

**Recommendation 8** – CIW and Welsh Government working with PACEY Cymru, should offer further support to childminders outlining what policy and procedure documents they need to produce, what the content of these documents should be and who they should share these documents with.

**Recommendation 9** – CIW and the Welsh Government, working alongside other partners including PACEY Cymru, should review the current paperwork which childminders are required to produce with a view of streamlining or simplifying some aspects of it where possible.

**Recommendation 10** – The Welsh Government, working with PACEY Cymru, should consider offering more funded IT and digital literacy courses for childminders aimed at helping them to deal with the increased digital focus being introduced across all administrative processes.

**Recommendation 11** – CIW should consider offering childminding settings the opportunity to receive informal visits from inspectors, in-between formal inspections, so that they can be advised on what they can expect during the inspection and areas they may need to address prior to a formal inspection. The Welsh Government would need to allocate further resources to CIW to enable this to happen.

**Recommendation 12** – where possible, CIW should ensure that the same inspectors undertake formal inspections at childcare settings during each visit. This would ensure increased consistency for individual settings and continuity in the onsite inspection processes.

**Recommendation 13** – where required, CIW may need to ensure that all inspectors receive the same briefing as to what they should be focussing on during each visit. This information should also be shared with childminders in advance of each inspection visit. This would again ensure consistency in the inspection process.

**Recommendation 14** – The Welsh Government working with local authority Family Information Services and PACEY Cymru should raise the profile of childminders through promotional activities highlighting the high level of professionalism, skills and standards of childcare offered by childminders.

## **Supporting childminders to accommodate more demand for childcare places**

**Recommendation 15** – CIW should consider introducing more flexibility in the way childminders can apply NMS staffing ratios during short periods of the day to enable childminders to better accommodate out of school childcare before and after school as well as overlapping wrap around care during lunchtimes.

**Recommendation 16** – The Welsh Government should work with planning authorities across local authority areas in Wales to provide childminders with more information about planning application requirements to enable them to expand the capacity of their provision. Better communication is also required between planning authorities and childcare services within local authorities to ensure that information relating to planning is conveyed to childminders in a consistent and relevant way.

**Recommendation 17** – The Welsh Government and local authorities should consider providing additional funding support for childminders to help them with the costs associated with planning applications.

## **Supporting childminders to be more financially viable and sustainable.**

**Recommendation 18** - Building on the recommendation included in the evaluation of the Childcare Business Support Grant, to resource a larger promotional campaign to reach individuals who are not already on the journey into childminding, further efforts may be required to raise childminders' awareness of the wider business support available to them through agencies such as Business Wales<sup>1</sup>. This could possibly be achieved through specifically targeted messaging. Business support services may also need to consider alternative ways of delivering support to childminders - possibly combining tailored support with childminder group or network activities.

**Recommendation 19**– Local authorities, with the support of the Welsh Government, should consider extending opportunities to deliver wider government funded provision to childminders across all local authority areas in Wales.

## **Supporting childminders' resilience**

**Recommendation 20** – all local authorities should consider delivering training, particularly mandatory training to childminders at times that are convenient for them. Online courses could be one way of achieving this but is unlikely to be the solution or preferred option for all childminders. As such a focus on face to face training delivered during evenings and / or weekends should also be a consideration. Where possible this training should be fully funded or offered at a discounted rate.

**Recommendation 21**– Local authorities working alongside PACEY Cymru should actively support and possibly accommodate local childminder network meetings and events. Newly registered childminders could be introduced to these networks so that they can gain support from their peers. Some training and other support activities could also be delivered to childminders via these networks.

## **Learning more about the needs of childminders**

**Recommendation 22** – SASS and other data relating to registrations and cancellations of childminder registrations needs to be gathered annually by CIW and the Welsh Government in a consistent manner on a LSOA level. This data also needs to contain information relating to the characteristics of childminders e.g. age, gender and language of setting.

**Recommendation 23** – the Welsh Government should consider undertaking or commissioning regular research relating to the opportunities and challenges faced by childminders in Wales in order to review the extent to which these challenges change or remain in place over time. This will inform the Welsh Government, and other stakeholders of the type of ongoing support required to increase the number of childminders operating across Wales.

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<sup>1</sup> [Evaluation of childcare business support grants | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/evaluation-of-childcare-business-support-grants)

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

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