

scma[®]

Scottish
Childminding
Association

committed to quality childcare

Early Learning & Childcare Audit 2021

An Independent Progress Report on the Inclusion of Professional Childminders in
Funded ELC delivery: Implications for the Childminding Workforce and Parental Choice



...SOME ENCOURAGING PROGRESS,
BUT STEP CHANGE REQUIRED

Based on returns from all 32 Scottish Local Authorities and snapshot surveys of 464 childminders and 276 parents

EMBARGOED: 00.01 HOURS THURSDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2021

CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	3
ELC Audit 2021.....	4-5
What Does this Actually Mean?.....	6-7
Inclusion of Professional Childminders in the Delivery of Funded ELC.....	8-9
Provider Neutrality.....	10-11
Flexibility.....	12-13
Funding Follows the Child.....	14-15
What is Working Well and What is Not Working.....	16-18
Implications of Our Findings: Childminding Workforce, Business Sustainability and Parental Choice.....	19-23
Conclusions and Recommendations	24-25
References.....	26

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 – ELC: Progress in Including Childminders in Delivering Funded ELC to Eligible Two-Year-Olds 2019-21: breakdown by local authority area
- Appendix 2 – ELC: Progress in Including Childminders in Delivering Funded ELC to Three- and Four-Year-Olds 2019-21: breakdown by local authority area
- Appendix 3 – Change to the Childminding Workforce 2019- 21: breakdown by local authority area

To view appendices and other supporting documents, please visit the [SCMA website](#).



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROGRESS

- Some progress has been made in increasing the number of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC for three and four-year-olds since 2019 (+510) ✓
- Where childminders are supported, such as through streamlined tendering exercises, progress has been made in involving them in delivering funded ELC ✓
- Progress is being made in areas of Scotland where local authorities understand and recognise the distinct benefits of professional childminding and its outcomes on children and families, and where they have involved childminders equitably in the delivery of funded ELC ✓
- Satisfaction rating from parents are encouraging (and higher amongst parents using childminders to access some or all of their funded hours entitlement) ✓
- Funding Follows the Child (key principle of ELC): a majority of parents appear to be getting their first choice of childcare provider for accessing their funded hours entitlement. However, many also report only receiving a single option which limits parental ability to make informed choice if they are not aware of what else may be available and if this would change their preference ✓
- Delivery of funded ELC is viewed very strongly by childminders as a potential means of increasing their business sustainability and also increases the attractiveness and competitiveness of their service to parents (but bureaucracy detracting from this and must be tackled) ✓

FURTHER WORK / STEP CHANGE REQUIRED

- While progress has been made in increasing the number of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC for three and four-year-olds since 2019 (+510), our 2021 audit highlighted that only 17.5% of the childminding workforce is now included in the delivery of funded ELC for this age group. This remains very low - and many of these childminders have only been involved on a partial basis (and on fewer hours than nurseries). Further work is required to accelerate and increase the number of childminders involved in funded ELC delivery to ensure that their level of involvement is equitable, meaningful and will support business sustainability ✗
- Progress has stalled in terms of involving professional childminders in the delivery of funded ELC to eligible two-year-olds (a key Scottish Government priority linked to support for low-income families). This is of significant concern ✗
- Provider Neutrality (key principle of ELC) is not working as it should. There is clear evidence that many local authorities are continuing to prioritise their own nursery provision. An alternative approach is required ✗
- There is clear evidence that some local authorities in Scotland are still not promoting childminding equitably alongside nursery as an option for parents to receive their funded ELC entitlement, limiting options and the ability for parents to make informed choice ✗
- Flexibility (key principle of ELC): there is strong demand for much more flexibility within funded ELC offers as some fixed offers may be resulting in significant lost hours. Further audit of this area recommended to inform understanding and support scrutiny ✗
- Bureaucracy: childminders involved in delivering funded ELC report this has caused a very significant increase in workload and paperwork due to duplicative quality assurance (nationally and locally) and excessive bureaucracy. The level of bureaucracy is causing some childminders involved in delivering funded ELC to stop doing so and also to leave the childminding workforce; only half of those delivering funded ELC would recommend doing so to others. Urgent action is required. ✗

SCMA EARLY LEARNING & CHILDCARE AUDIT 2021

BACKGROUND

In 2014, the Scottish Government enacted legislation to expand the entitlement to government-funded (free) early learning and childcare (referred to as 'funded ELC' throughout this report) from August 2016 – from 475 to 600 hours per year for all three- and four-year-olds as well as eligible two-year-olds¹. Then in 2016, the Scottish Government published 'A Blueprint for 2020: Expansion of Early Learning & Childcare in Scotland' setting out its commitment to almost doubling the hours of funded ELC to 1140 hours per year by August 2020². While much progress had been made with implementing funded ELC expansion prior to the pandemic, (and some local authorities had implemented 1140 hrs before the onset of COVID-19), not all had done so; and the statutory duty on local authorities to deliver 1140hrs of funded ELC was removed, and then reinstated from August 2021.



Since 2017, SCMA, has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to undertake an independent annual audit of local authorities' progress in including childminders in ELC expansion. We did not publish an audit last year due to the pandemic, but have reintroduced it for 2021.

Our previous annual audits simply reported on local authorities' progress in including childminders in funded ELC delivery, and made recommendations to the Scottish Government for action where required. This year, SCMA conducted two additional and separate, parallel snapshot surveys to explore childminders' and parents' experiences of funded ELC implementation, with the intention that adopting

this triangulated, three-point data approach would provide a more holistic and validated overview of funded ELC provision, enhancing our understanding and optimising the value of the audit.

While this 2021 audit provides a snapshot of where we are now, it should also be considered as a report on progress in including childminders in funded ELC delivery given that over five years of national and local implementation activity and experience to support ELC expansion has been underway since the Blueprint was published in 2016 - in addition to earlier experience in increasing the previous funded ELC entitlement from 475 to 600 hours.

SCMA ELC AUDIT 2021

Before commenting on the main findings of this year's audit, it would be appropriate to recognise the unprecedented, prolonged and disruptive nature of the pandemic and the adverse impact this had nationally and locally. However, as noted above, much progress had been made with local authority ELC expansion over a period of years preceding this, and the original implementation date of August 2020. While the statutory duty was removed, a number of local authorities continued to try to make '1140 by 2020' happen, and continued with local implementation activity throughout COVID-19. Credit is due to all involved.

The SCMA ELC Audit 2021 was conducted in late July/early August 2021 – we experienced positive engagement with the audit process, with responses received from all 32 local authorities in Scotland.

MAIN FINDINGS

As in previous years, we captured data separately on local authorities' progress in including childminders in the delivery of funded ELC for eligible two-year-olds (a key Scottish Government priority linked to support for low-income families) and the delivery of funded ELC for three and four year-olds. Headline summary findings are presented below and detailed tables reporting progress by individual local authority area are included in Appendix 1 and 2.

ELIGIBLE TWO-YEAR-OLDS

CHILDMINDERS APPROVED

2019	2021	Change 19-21
773 (16.2%)	1174 (28.9%)	+401 (+12.7%)

CHILDMINDERS DELIVERING

2019	2021	Change 19-21
156 (3.3%)	168 (4.1%)	+12 (+0.8%)

CHILDREN PLACED WITH CHILDMINDERS

2019	2021	Change 19-21
196	207	+11

While good progress has been made by some local authorities in approving more childminders to deliver funded ELC for eligible two-year-olds (now 28.9% of the childminding workforce), significant barriers continue to be experienced in including childminders in actually delivering funded ELC for eligible two-year-olds. In particular, many childminders continue to report that they do not believe local authorities are promoting childminding equitably, alongside local authorities' own nursery provision, to parents as an option for receiving their funded ELC entitlement. Progress in eligible Two's

has now stalled, with only 4.1% of the childminding workforce involved in delivery. **This represents just a 0.8% (n=12) increase in childminders included in delivery and an increase of only 11 children supported in two years and is of significant concern, particularly given the Scottish Government's priority of supporting low-income families and the commitment within the Programme for Government to expand ELC downwards to include one-year-olds³.**

THREE AND FOUR-YEAR-OLDS

CHILDMINDERS APPROVED

2019	2021	Change 19-21
599 (12.6%)	1182 (29.1%)	+583 (+16.5%)

CHILDMINDERS DELIVERING

2019	2021	Change 19-21
199 (4.2%)	709 (17.5%)	+510 (+13.3%)

CHILDREN PLACED WITH CHILDMINDERS

2019	2021	Change 19-21
413	1558	+1145

More encouraging progress has been made with provision for three and four-year-olds, with increases in childminders approved (up by 16.5%) and delivering funded hours for three and four-year-olds (up by 13.3%, or an additional 510 childminders, to 17.5% of the childminding workforce) since 2019. The number of three- and four-year-olds receiving funded ELC with a childminder has also risen by 1145 to 1558. This progress presents some positivity and has been largely due to the combined efforts of SCMA and local authority staff to increase these

numbers. **However, with only 17.5% of the childminding workforce included in delivery of funded ELC for three- and four-year-olds after five years of intensive national and local activity to support ELC expansion - this figure remains low. It also does not present the full picture as to the actual level (number and percentage of hours) that childminders delivering funded ELC are involved and how this compares with the hours allocated to nurseries.**

WHAT DOES THIS ACTUALLY MEAN?

The headline findings from our 2021 audit are important, but cannot be considered in isolation, nor do they present the full picture. While the progress in including more childminders in the delivery of funded ELC for three and four year-olds is positive, this should also be considered in the context of the latest ELC Delivery Progress Report (Improvement Service, September 2021) which found that as of August 2021 **only 2% of funded ELC hours are being taken by parents and carers within childminding settings** in comparison to 68% in local authority nurseries and 30% in private nurseries⁴. While it has previously been suggested that the low uptake of funded ELC hours in childminding settings may be due to parental choice, we do not believe the evidence supports this and that other factors are contributing to this low uptake.

In addition, neither the SCMA audit results nor the Improvement Service report provide detail on the actual nature of the funded hours within this 2% that are being delivered by childminders and, importantly, how these compare with the funded hours being accessed in nurseries and other settings. There are clear examples of good practice where some local authorities have been very supportive in working closely with SCMA and including professional childminders in funded ELC delivery equitably, however, **SCMA continues to receive reports that some local authorities in Scotland have been requiring parents to take the bulk of their 1140 hours of funded ELC with local authority nurseries; and that they have not been promoting childminding equitably as an option available to parents for receiving their funded hours. In addition, where childminders have been included in delivery of funded ELC - the hours involved have often been negligible, childminders feel like they are receiving “the scraps” and this clearly will not enable childminding businesses involved in the delivery of funded ELC to remain financially sustainable.** In such cases, this is contrary to one of the founding principles of ELC, which requires that offers made to parents by all of Scotland’s 32 local authorities (as the gatekeepers for ELC and with responsibility for overseeing local expansion) must be “Provider Neutral”.

In parallel, we had received reports that parents in some local authority areas had been receiving single, fixed, and inflexible offers of their funded ELC entitlement (including 10-hour sessions on fixed days of the week) and that these were required to be taken with local authority nurseries. For parents, this must feel quite different to the original intent of ‘1140 by 2020’ - providing parents with flexible childcare and in which Funding Follows the Child – both also founding principles of ELC expansion. As such, SCMA captured more data on this issue to complement our ELC 2021 audit by surveying childminders (all SCMA members) as well as parents and carers.

The purpose of the two surveys was to capture experiential information around the founding ELC principles of **Provider Neutrality, Flexibility and Funding Follows the Child in addition to what is working well and what is not working well** to inform future practice. These small-scale surveys were intended to provide snapshots to complement the ELC audit returns and help to identify areas which would benefit from follow-up audit or research. We received 464 responses to the Childminders Survey (from 31 local authority areas) and 276 responses to the Parents’ Survey (from 29 local authority areas).





We have gathered a large amount of data through our audit and surveys, this main ELC report aims to present the main issues and findings thematically –

- INCLUSION OF PROFESSIONAL CHILDMINDERS IN THE DELIVERY OF FUNDED ELC
- PROVIDER NEUTRALITY
- FLEXIBILITY
- FUNDING FOLLOWS THE CHILD
- WHAT IS WORKING WELL AND NOT WORKING WELL
- IMPLICATIONS OF OUR FINDINGS: CHILDMINDING WORKFORCE, BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY AND PARENTAL CHOICE

It also makes a series of recommendations including for further audit and research.

INCLUSION OF PROFESSIONAL CHILDMINDERS IN THE DELIVERY OF FUNDED ELC



“Nursery takes whatever hours they require and I get what is left over. Consideration is not given to whether the full hours are being used at nursery” ...

“The set nursery hours take up majority of funding” ...

“This year the nursery places have changed to two full days 8am – 6pm ...to blend with a childminder their only option is to either use 4.5 hours a week for 50 weeks of the year or 23 x 10 hour days over the year”.

Sample responses to SCMA ELC Childminders Survey, August/September 2021

As previously noted, the number of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC for eligible two-year-olds has stalled at 4.1% of the childminding workforce (despite 28.9% of the childminding workforce having been approved to deliver funded ELC for eligible two-year-olds).

And while the increase in the number of childminders delivering funded ELC for three and four year-olds (an additional 510 childminders) could appear more encouraging with 17.5% of the

childminding workforce now involved in delivering funded hours for this age group, disparities and barriers also continue to exist here with 29.1% of the workforce approved.

Further insight provided by the snapshot Childminders Survey raises concern about how meaningfully some childminders currently delivering funded ELC have actually been included and if this will support business sustainability.

	Parents' Survey: Models of Funded ELC Accessed Through a Childminder	Childminders' Survey: Models of Funded ELC Currently Delivered
Three-and-four-year-olds: blended placement	63.2%	77.3%
Three-and-four-year-Olds: full hours	32.2%	40.5%
Eligible two-year-olds: full hours	5.8%	20%
Eligible two-year-olds: blended placement	1.2%	6%

From the above separate and confirmatory data sources, it can be seen that the vast majority of childminders who are involved in funded ELC delivery have only been involved with a lower level of numbers and as part of blended placements for three and four year-olds. While data was not requested, nor generally provided within audit returns on the actual breakdown of hours between nurseries and childminders involved in blended placements, a number of responders volunteered that nurseries had fixed setting times and “the remainder” of hours would then be allocated to childminders. It is also very likely that the extent to which childminders may have been involved in delivering funded hours mainly through blended placements is under-reported due to the restrictions which have limited blended placements at various points during COVID-19. Clearly, we recognise that demand for blended placements is driven by parents who have made an informed choice for their child(ren) to receive childcare both from a nursery and a childminding setting; but the limits on the number of hours that can be taken in a childminding setting, (and when), are largely set by the local authority and linked, firstly, to their nursery hours.

Linking these different pieces of information together, it is not difficult to see that many childminders are still not being treated or included equitably after

over five years of national and local activity to implement ELC expansion - and that issues around a lack of Provider Neutrality, as outlined in the next section of this report, continue to play a significant factor. The findings on Page 21 regarding the link between the delivery of funded ELC and business sustainability also make very important reading and highlight the loss of business arising for childminders not involved in delivering funded hours and for those experiencing delays in being included. This has serious implications both for the sustainability of childminding businesses and for parental choice.

51.1% of childminders who have been approved, but are not yet involved in delivering funded ELC, have been waiting for 18+ months since approval; and a further 26.7% for 12-18 months

SCMA ELC Childminders Survey, August/September 2021



PROVIDER NEUTRALITY

“The approach which enables parents and carers to choose from a variety of ELC settings that best suits the needs of their child, in line with Funding Follows the Child. It allows parents and carers to choose from a number of different providers – regardless of whether they are in the public, private or third sectors, including childminders – if the setting meets the National Standard, has a place available and is willing to enter into a contract with the local authority.

‘Funding follows the child and the national standard for early learning and childcare providers: Principles and Practice’, Scottish Government, December 2018

The implementation of ‘1140 by 2020’ has been a very large undertaking over the last five years and has been a task of a scale and complexity which SCMA has not under-estimated. It has also created some challenges – one of which is that local authorities have been placed in a position where they have a conflict of interests. They have had a responsibility for commissioning and procuring ELC services and developing local expansion plans, which are required to be ‘Provider Neutral’ to promote and support parental choice of all forms of childcare including childminding, while also being a direct service provider themselves through their own nursery provision. As has been clear from successive annual SCMA ELC audits, commissioned by the Scottish Government, over the last five years some local authorities have managed this conflict of interest well, others less so.

SCMA has worked closely, collaboratively and supportively with the Scottish Government, local authorities and other stakeholders throughout ELC expansion. We have **previously recommended**

the need for greater action to ensure that the founding principle of Provider Neutrality is upheld and to ensure that childminding is promoted equitably by local authorities to parents alongside their own nursery provision and other childcare providers as a choice for receiving their funded hours.

Data capture for our 2021 ELC Audit was expanded to ask local authorities if they offer parents the option of receiving their funded hours in full with a childminder or as part of a blended placement – where funded hours are split between a childminder and another childcare provider i.e. a nursery. While most local authorities reported that childminding is now being offered as an option to parents in full, or as part of a blended arrangement, SCMA’s snapshot surveys of both parents and childminders would suggest a different picture – where childminding is **not** being promoted equitably and some requirements remain for parents and carers to take part or all of their funded ELC hours with local authority nurseries.

LOCAL AUTHORITY PROMOTION OF CHILDMINDING TO PARENTS FOR ACCESSING FUNDED HOURS



What Our ELC Audit Said (out of 32 local authorities)

- Eligible two-year-olds: childminding offered as an option for funded hours in full (29) or as part of a blended arrangement (27)
- Three- and Four-Year-Olds: childminding offered as an option for funded hours in full (29) or as part of a blended arrangement (29)

What Childminders Said (snapshot)

- 52% of childminders involved at all stages of funded ELC believe their local authority has been very ineffective or ineffective at promoting childminding equitably as a choice, alongside nursery provision

What Parents Said (snapshot)

- 49% of parents who are accessing funded hours through a childminder were not offered childminding as an option for their funded hours and had to request it
- 42.9% of parents who are not accessing funded hours through a childminder were not given the option or were aware they could access funded ELC through a childminder (increasing to 67.9% of those who responded believing this wasn't highlighted by a local authority)
- Sub-analysis of responses from parents accessing funded ELC through a childminder found 75% of parents with eligible two-year-olds were not offered the option of full funded hours with a childminder; increasing to 88% not offered the option of a blended placement for eligible two-year-olds with a childminder

REQUIREMENT TO TAKE HOURS WITH LOCAL AUTHORITY NURSERY

- 20.5% of parents accessing funded hours through a childminder reported a requirement to take some or all hours with a local authority nursery
- 33.3% of parents not accessing funded hours through a childminder reported a requirement to take some or all of their hours with a local authority nursery

FLEXIBILITY



“Current ELC delivery models, particularly within local authorities must become more flexible and responsive to parental demand”.

‘A blueprint for 2020: the expansion of early learning and childcare (ELC) in Scotland - ELC expansion planning guidance for local authorities’, Scottish Government, March 2017

Another key driver of the policy ambitions within the expansion of ELC has been the aim to increase flexibility for parents, so that the childcare provided is more flexible and responsive to their needs.

Within the context of childminding, flexibility is a key feature and many professional childminders have been providing very flexible, high-quality childcare well beyond the limits of traditional local authority nursery hours for some years. This flexibility has increased in line with parental demand. Recent evidence, in the form of independent research commissioned by the Scottish Government and undertaken by Ipsos/MORI confirmed this is still viewed as a very strong feature and benefit of childminding by parents and in which parents report childminders often going “above and beyond” what may be expected from childcare⁵.

As previously noted, SCMA received reports that some parents had been receiving very fixed offers for their entitlement of funded ELC from local authorities. The Scottish Government had sought to assist providers and parents by increasing the maximum statutory length of a funded hours session to 10 hours. While this was intended to offer flexibility to enable providers to respond to parental demand, SCMA learned that some local authorities were instead offering parents fixed 10-hour sessions, on fixed days of the week, regardless of their need. This felt contradictory to the intent of ELC to provide flexibility to parents.

In order to improve understanding of ‘flexibility’ - and the extent to which funded hours offers for the nursery year commencing August 2021 are meeting this key principle of ELC (and also parental demand for flexibility in childcare provision), we also captured data within our surveys of parents and childminders.

While it is recognised that it would not be possible to respond to every individual and personalised parental preference, the findings of both of these snapshot surveys would suggest that there is still a significant gap behind the Scottish Government’s intent on flexibility and what is happening in practice at a local level. **Over half of all parents (including those using and not using a childminder to access their funded hours at this time) reported that they need either ‘much more’ or ‘more’ flexibility in funded**



hours offers; and over half of all childminders who responded (including both those involved at some stage within delivery of funded ELC and those not involved) also reported that, based on their experience of supporting parents, ‘much more’ or ‘more’ flexibility in funded offers is needed. The experience of childminders not involved in funded ELC should be of particular note if we wish to increase uptake of funded hours and understand why parents may not wish to access funded ELC. In such cases, childminders’ experiences of supporting families who have chosen not to access their funded hours entitlement at all and have instead chosen to continue to pay privately for their childcare from a childminder would indicate this is due to the funded ELC offers being too restrictive and inflexible for their needs. The findings on the extent of the inflexible nature of offers made to parents, including requirements that funded hours offers can often only be taken on fixed days and at fixed times of the week, make concerning reading and would indicate that offers to parents continue to be influenced more by local authority preferred operating patterns than parental demand and how different partner providers (local authority nurseries, Private, Voluntary & Independent providers and childminders) can meet this demand.





Flexibility: Future Needs for Funded Hours Offers

What Parents Said (snapshot)

Parents Using a Childminder



- Much more flexibility needed (26.4%) 
- More flexibility needed (29.9%) 

Parents Not Using a Childminder



- Much more flexibility needed (39.3%) 
- More flexibility needed (33.9%) 

What Childminders Said (snapshot)

Childminders involved in funded ELC, based on their experience of supporting parents and families

- Much more flexibility needed (24.4%) 
- More flexibility needed (27.9%) 

Childminders not involved in funded ELC, and based on their experiences of supporting families who have chosen not to access funded hours




- Much more flexibility needed (32.5%) 
- More flexibility needed (26.8%) 






Restrictions Within Offers When Funded Hours Could be Taken

What Parents Said (snapshot)

Parents Using a Childminder

- 40% reported fixed times 
- 28.2% reported fixed days of the week 
- 20.5% reported a requirement to take some or all hours with local authority nursery 

Parents Not Using a Childminder

- 77.8% reported fixed times 
- 55.6% reported fixed days of the week 
- 33.3% reported a requirement to take some or all hours with a local authority nursery 



FUNDING FOLLOWS THE CHILD



“The Funding Follows the Child approach places choice in parents’ and carers’ hands allowing them to access their child’s funded entitlement from any setting – in the public, private or third sector, including from a childminder”

‘Funding follows the child and the national standard for early learning and childcare providers: Principles and Practice’, Scottish Government, December 2018

The expansion of ELC and the implementation of ‘1140 by 2020’ has also been underpinned by the key principle of Funding Follows the Child. Within this approach the Scottish Government would provide funding to local authorities to enable parents to receive their statutory entitlement of 1140 hours of funded ELC. Parents would be able to choose from a range of childcare providers (including childminders) in their area, who meet the criteria within the National Standard and who are willing to enter into a contract to deliver funded hours and the local authority would pass payment on to the chosen childcare provider for this.

Parents have been receiving annual offers from local authorities for their entitlement of funded hours both before and throughout the period of ELC expansion. SCMA had not been aware of any quantitative or qualitative work to explore the extent to which parents had been receiving their preferred choice for receipt of funded hours.

The pandemic has disrupted access to and the provision of childcare to varying degrees, depending on the severity of operating restrictions. During the national lockdown in spring 2020 all childcare care settings had to close unless they were providing critical childcare to key workers and vulnerable children. Restrictions were eased in advance of nurseries and schools returning in August 2020 and were then re-imposed when all of mainland Scotland went into Level 4 in late December last year. However, since spring 2021 operating restrictions in childcare have continued to ease further and as such, it felt timely to also capture some data on the extent to which parents received their choice of childcare within their offers of funded hours for the year commencing August 2021.

More encouraging findings were reported on Funding Follows the Child, than on Provider Neutrality and Flexibility. While around 60% of parents reported only receiving a single option, 59% of parents using a childminder and 74% of parents not using a childminder to access their funded hours reported they received their first choice of provider. 70% of childminders delivering funded ELC also reported that they believed all of the funded children in their settings were parental first choices.

Looking at the match between what parents had asked for and the offer received from their local authority, 68.6% of parents accessing their funded hours through a childminder believed there was a very strong/strong match - compared with 53.5% of parents not accessing their funded hours through a childminder. We believe this lower level could be linked to concerns reported earlier around a lack of flexibility arising from fixed session days and lengths (including 10-hour sessions which in some cases respondents indicated exceeded parents’ needs or preferences). We also believe that if parents are largely just presented with a nursery-based offer, consider their local preference of nursery and receive their choice of nursery this is quite different to presenting parents with a range of options covering different types of childcare (nursery, childminder or other) and enabling them to make informed choice and in which preferences could change. Anecdotally, a number of members have reported to us that some parents continue to feel pressured into putting nursery down as their first choice in case they lose this option going forward and decide at a later stage that they would like their child(ren) to experience some nursery childcare.



Funded ELC Offers and Choice

What Parents Said (snapshot)

Parents accessing funded hours through a childminder

- 60.5% of parents received one option, 22.2% received two options and 12.4% received 3 options ✓
- 59% of parents using a childminder for their full hours reported this was their first choice ✓
- 78% of parents using a childminder for funded hours through blended placements reported they received their first choice of provider. 70% also reported getting their first choice of nursery through blended placements ✓

Parents not accessing funded hours through a childminder

- 50.9% of parents received one option, 25.5% received two options and 14.6% received three options ✓
- 74.1% reported receiving their first choice of provider, 16.7% their second choice ✓

What Childminders Said (snapshot)

- 70.7% of childminders delivering funded hours believed all of the children in their setting were parental first choices ✓
- a further 14.7% believed the majority of funded children in their settings were parental first choice ✓



Satisfaction Levels, and Match Between Offers and What Parents Wanted

What Parents Said (snapshot)

Parents accessing funded hours through a childminder

- 79.1% of parents believe their current provision meets their family needs ✓
- 68.6% of parents thought there was a strong/very strong match between the offer and what they asked for ✓
- 38.6% of parents were very satisfied with their experience of accessing funded hours and 44.3% were satisfied ✓

Parents not accessing funded hours through a childminder

- 64.3% of parents believe their current provision meets their family needs ✓
- 53.5% of parents thought there was a strong/very strong match between the offer and what they asked for ✓
- 26.8% of parents were very satisfied with their experience of accessing funded hours and 35.7% satisfied ✓

✓ (mostly)

WHAT IS WORKING WELL AND NOT WORKING WELL



SCMA fulfills a number of functions. We are the only organisation in Scotland specialising in and dedicated to supporting all aspects of childminding practice.

We are a professional membership organisation for childminders (of which approx. 80% of all childminders in Scotland are members) and provide a professional voice for the childminding workforce; working closely at a national level with the Scottish Government and other stakeholders to influence and inform policy and support policy implementation. We also contract with a number of local authorities to deliver a range of services to support ELC implementation, vulnerable children and families and childminding development. As such, we have extensive experience and knowledge of what works and is not working well in practice, and the additional data gathered via our Parents' and Childminders snapshot surveys further enhances our knowledge and understanding.

The following page includes a summary of the main aspects which parents and childminders feel are working well and not working well with funded ELC, followed by two anonymised case studies which help to demonstrate balanced examples of how provision of funded ELC entitlement is working for families at this time.

The main focus of parental comment in survey responses was that while clearly appreciating the positive nature of free childcare, many of the offers are too rigid, do not meet parents' demand for childcare and could be resulting in families losing hours from their entitlement. **The small size of our survey of parents is acknowledged, however the three-point triangulation of data with local authority audit returns and our survey of childminders (in addition to SCMA's own operational experience), would strongly indicate that there may be value, from a public accountability and scrutiny perspective, for a specific audit to be undertaken independently (by Audit Scotland or the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee) examining this area given the loss of public income which could arise if the practice of allocating fixed 10 hour days to parents regardless of their need, for ease of**

local authority nursery administration and operation, is replicated widely around Scotland.

The main focus of comment received from childminders was around the restrictive nature of many offers to parents, often based firstly around the nursery's need with only the balance or remainder of hours being available to childminders, accompanied by continuing concern around childminding not being presented and promoted equitably to parents alongside local authority nursery provision as an option for receiving their funded hours. A number of positive contributory factors were, however, reported including - clearer, lighter-touch tendering and procurement exercises (clear, shorter documentation, minimising supporting information required and the time required of childminder to prepare this); support to participate in tendering exercises by local authority staff; support to participate in tendering exercises by SCMA; and positive engagement and good communication from local authority staff. While some encouraging progress appears to have been made in this area - further work is required as 40-66% of childminders at various points in the process ('delivering', 'approved, but not yet delivering' and 'applied, but not yet approved') reported that they found local authority tendering exercises and documentation difficult / very difficult.

Clearly, and as more childminders have become involved in delivering funded hours, a major concern is the level of bureaucracy and paperwork involved. The vast majority of childminders reported this has led to a significant increase or an increase in their paperwork. A total of 177 childminders not involved in funded ELC also responded to our Childminders Survey and it was interesting to note that the vast majority of these childminders believed delivering funded hours would result in a significant increase/increase in their workload and that this was cited as the main reason as to why they did not wish to deliver funded ELC.

What is Working Well

What Parents Said (snapshot)

- Appreciative of free childcare ✓
- Application process generally straightforward ✓
- Parents using a childminder often said their childminder helped and guided them through the application process ✓
- A number received their first choice of provider (but not necessarily the hours they wanted) ✓

What Childminders Said (snapshot)

- An increasing number of childminders are reporting that local authority tendering, documentation and staff support is 'good', however a significant number of childminders still reporting tendering exercises are difficult ✓
- Support from SCMA staff (in areas with local staff) ✓

What is Not Working Well

What Parents Said (snapshot)

- Offers are too rigid / not enough flexibility ✗
- Some offers (particularly in local authority nurseries i.e. 9.00am-3.00pm) don't meet working parents' needs ✗
- Conversely, longer offers (i.e. 10-hour days allocated in nursery) can quite often be wasteful and based on nursery operating preference rather than what parents need – resulting in parents receiving much less than their full entitlement of 1140hrs and a sense that the Funding isn't all Following the Child (would childcare vouchers support this more for parents?). See anonymised real case study on Page 18 ✗
- Some local authorities still not offering blended placements; and where they do hours with childminders can be very limited ✗

What Childminders Said (snapshot)

- Too many local authorities are prioritising their own nurseries; childminders left with 'scraps' ✗
- Many local authorities have not promoted childminding equitably to parents, alongside their own nursery provision, as an option for receiving their funded ELC hours ✗
- Bureaucracy:
 - 86.3% of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC reported a significant increase/increase in paperwork ✗
 - 93.3% of childminders not involved in delivering funded ELC believed it would result in a significant increase in paperwork; respondents also reported this as the main factor in deciding not to get involved in ELC) ✗
 - Only 57.3% of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC would recommend doing so ✗
- 40+% of childminders involved at different stages of funded ELC still find the tendering exercises and documentation very difficult/difficult ✗

What is Working Well

CASE STUDY Child 1 - Local Authority A

Parental Need:

Parent initially using 1140 hours funded ELC entitlement as a blended placement (split between nursery and childminder). The three-year old child couldn't settle at nursery and was happier in the home-from-home environment which the childminder could provide. Parent approached the local authority and nursery to arrange a change. The child has since begun full funded ELC placement with the childminder, who is a partner provider with the local authority, and is happy and thriving in this environment.

Local Authority Offer:

Supportive of the parent's wishes to initially split their 1140 funded ELC entitlement in a blended childcare arrangement; and flexible in enabling

the decision to switch to using entire funded ELC 1140 hours with the childminder, after the original placement had started, recognising this was in the best interests of the child.

What This Means:

Parents receiving their full 1140 ELC entitlement with the childminder, 30 hours per week, term time*, and childminder is receiving full payment for 1140 hours.

Principles of ELC:

- Provider neutral ✓
- Flexibility ✓
- Funding follows the child ✓

*Term-time model for this local authority is 38 weeks

What is Not Working Well

CASE STUDY Child 2, Local Authority B

Parental need:

- Blended placement between childminder and nursery, term time, covering 9.00am – 3.00pm

Local Authority Offer:

- No term-time offered, single offer of 48-week standardised model for blended placements – requirement to take two full days (9.5 hours each day) in local authority nursery with up to 230 hours annually with the childminder. The hours with the childminder could be taken as 23 ten-hour days throughout the year or as 4.5 hours sessions weekly throughout the year.

What this means:

- 48-week model: - 912 hours required to be taken with local authority and only 228 available for childminder
- parent only uses 9.00am – 3.00pm within fixed 9.5 hour days, in line with their need, resulting in 3.5hrs lost funded hours twice weekly for 48 weeks: **-336 hours**. Actual number of funded

hours received out of 1140 entitlement:
804 hours

- local authority nursery receives payment for **+336 hours** in which child is not in setting
- parent only requires term-time, so actual hours received likely to be lower than 804 hours and actual hours for which local authority nursery is paid for hours in which the child is not in the setting likely be higher than 336 hours
- significant loss at an individual level, amplified at a local authority level and possibly more widely (it is not believed this practice is restricted to a single local authority)

Principles of ELC:

- Provider Neutral ✗
- Flexibility ✗
- Funding Follows the Child ✓/✗

IMPLICATIONS OF OUR FINDINGS: CHILDMINDING WORKFORCE, BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY & PARENTAL CHOICE

Adverse Effect of ELC Expansion on Professional Childminding Workforce

SCMA published our last ELC Audit in October 2019⁶. In addition to reporting on local authority progress in including childminders in delivering funded hours the audit also reported the worsening trends within the childminding workforce. It was reported that in the five-year period of 2014-19 the childminding workforce had decreased by 14.5% - in parallel to ELC nursery expansion - and that workforce losses and shifts were also being experienced in other childcare providers linked to the rapid scale of recruitment required to support local authority nursery expansion to deliver 1140 by 2020. This had the unintended consequence of de-stabilising the childminding and wider social care workforce^{7,8}. **Two years later, the decline in the childminding workforce has continued to accelerate and latest data reports that the childminding workforce has now reduced by 26.4% (1475 childminders) in the last five-year period of July 2016-21⁹.**

Our 2019 audit made a series of recommendations, including that Scottish Government should commission independent research into the declining trends within the childminding workforce. This recommendation was accepted and it was agreed this research would be overseen jointly by the Scottish Government, Care Inspectorate and SCMA. This was then delayed by the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. Recognising how acute our workforce pressures were and that they may worsen further as a result of COVID-19, SCMA has continued to be very active in this area and has been leading nationally on the development of a strategic response to these issues –

- we were keen not to lose time and conducted a large-scale membership survey in spring 2020 (1470 responses/38% response level). This sought to capture data about these workforce trends and, importantly, to capture data about the childminding workforce's future intentions to inform workforce planning. **This survey found that the level of paperwork and bureaucracy associated with current childminding practice was the main reason that childminders had left the workforce (70%) and also for those who were considering leaving within the next five years (59%) followed by not feeling able to compete with the rapid scale of ELC nursery expansion¹⁰.**



Continues...

Adverse Effect of ELC Expansion on Professional Childminding Workforce (Continued)

The survey also found that on top of the significant decline in our workforce within the last five years, 25% of childminders within the remaining workforce did not believe they will still be childminding in five years' time and a further 26% didn't know if they would be. We believe this data to be deeply worrying and compelling, as it provides evidence of the makings of a potential workforce crisis. While we need to account and adjust for the age profile of the childminding workforce (21% aged 55+), the results indicated a strong opportunity to positively influence this situation if we could reduce the pressure on the childminding workforce – as only 25% planning to leave the workforce said that nothing could be done to change their minds;

- SCMA advocated for and secured a commitment from the Scottish Government to develop a new Action Plan on Childminding and subsequently worked to influence its development; ^{11,12}
- as the situation with COVID-19 improved, the workforce research, due to be overseen by the Scottish Government, Care Inspectorate and SCMA, was brought back on and Ipsos/MORI were appointed to undertake this important work. **SCMA shared our survey findings to feed into this research; we have been closely involved in this process** and the research is due to be published in December 2021;
- SCMA launched our new three-year strategy, 'Changing the Narrative', in May 2021 which was developed to promote recovery post-pandemic, strengthen childminding, support families and increase parental choice¹³. At its heart, our new strategy includes a dedicated work stream aimed at developing a more sustainable childminding workforce and addressing any issues which threaten this; A range of actions are underway and in development;

- recognising the increasing adverse impact that excessive bureaucracy was having on the childminding workforce, including causing childminders previously involved in delivering funded hours to stop doing so, SCMA made a detailed **submission to the independent expert group on Education Reform** in September 2021¹⁴. In addition to being charged with replacing the SQA, this group will also consider future educational inspection requirements following the decision to remove the inspection function from Education Scotland. SCMA believes this presents a valuable opportunity to consider the wider scrutiny landscape. This will be important. An earlier review of ELC in 2015 recommended that a single, shared inspection should be developed for ELC and the Scottish Government charged the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland with developing this¹⁵. This didn't happen, as a result of which we now have two separate quality frameworks which childminders involved in funded ELC delivery are often expected to follow. This includes inspection by the Care Inspectorate, and/or from local authorities using the Education Scotland framework (and who believe they are legally responsible for delivering quality for ELC and childminders locally) developing their own quality assurance systems involving further self-evaluation and inspection. SCMA shared our response with senior officials in the Scottish Government and Care Inspectorate, urging senior buy-in and recognition of the issues, and a commitment to working with us a part of multi-stakeholder response. Since then, the issue of bureaucracy has provided the main focus for a recent meeting of the Monitoring Group overseeing the Action Plan on Childminding. SCMA also convened a focus group, comprised of elected SCMA Scottish Executive Board Members to inform this process; and
- more recently, linked to our new three-year strategy, **SCMA convened and led a National and Local Stakeholder Strategic Discussion on Childminder Recruitment and Retention in Remote and Rural Areas** which was held on 11 November 2021. This meeting was arranged to facilitate discussion around the need for a joined-up strategic response, given the particular pressures being experienced and was attended by eleven of the most remote and rural local authorities in Scotland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Scottish Government, Care Inspectorate, COSLA and Skills Development Scotland.



SCMA is taking the issues faced by the childminding workforce very seriously and has undertaken a high level of work to redress these areas. However, while some support has been provided by the Scottish Government, we believe a further step change in activity is required. Many of the issues which are reported within this year's audit are not new and are known issues – particularly around the lack of Provider Neutrality exercised by some local authorities and that childminding is not being promoted equitably to parents as an option for receiving their ELC funded hours entitlement. SCMA has been reporting on these issues within our annual audits commissioned by the Scottish Government since 2017 and during which time much discussion has also taken place in partnership meetings.

In our 2019 audit we expressly advised that –

“While recognising the provider-neutral nature of ELC policy, national guidance should be strengthened as a matter of urgency to require all local authorities to ensure a more balanced provider model within their delivery plans including all provider types (local authority, private, voluntary sector and childminding) and to avoid any bias in commissioning. National guidance should state recommended mixes of provision, with local authorities required to provide evidence as to where this may not be possible (i.e. in remote and rural locations where ensuring a national recommended mix may not be feasible), but also providing detail of what steps may be taken to improve the mix of provision”. SCMA ELC Audit 2019

This recommendation was not accepted by the Scottish Government and issues have continued to be experienced with Provider Neutrality. While this is a key principle of ELC, we now have over five years of activity to support ELC expansion - and it needs to be recognised that this key principle has been let down by inconsistent implementation across local authority areas.

Business Sustainability & Bureaucracy

Business Sustainability is deeply embedded within ELC, It was anticipated that the founding principles of Provider Neutrality and Funding Follows the Child would support the future sustainability of childcare providers across the sector, and the guidance on ELC also requires childcare providers participating in funded hours delivery to demonstrate their business sustainability.

The pandemic has been an unprecedented national emergency. During this period there has been a significant decrease in demand for childcare due to Scottish Government guidance which required people to work from home and as a result of many parents being on furlough. The Scottish and UK Governments provided some valuable financial support at different points during the pandemic, but childminders and school aged childcare (SAC) settings remain the most financially vulnerable and continue to have concerns about their business sustainability.

Our Childminder Survey conducted alongside this year's audit makes mixed reading. On the one hand, the Scottish Government should take some encouragement from the findings that the majority of childminders involved in ELC (at all stages of the process), who responded believe delivering funded hours is very important / important to their future business sustainability and that it is also very

important / important in making their setting more attractive and competitive to parents. However, the actual offers from local authorities to parents present a weaker match with childminders' business sustainability and there is a mismatch between the potential of ELC to support business sustainability and what would appear to be happening locally in practice. The corresponding findings on the level of bureaucracy associated with delivering funded hours (see 'What is Not Working Well on page 17) also make deeply worrying reading and threaten to negate any potential benefit to business sustainability. As such, it is clear the issue of bureaucracy must be addressed urgently by the Scottish Government to support retention and recruitment of professional childminders in the delivery of funded ELC.

Continues...

Delivering Funded ELC and Business Sustainability

What Childminders Said (snapshot)

- 67.2% of childminders involved at all stages of funded ELC believe delivering funded ELC is very important/important for business sustainability;
 - 52.8% of those currently delivering funded hours believe this has very significantly/significantly increased the competitiveness and attractiveness of their business to parents;
 - However, only 30.4% of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC believe there is a very strong/strong match between local authority ELC offers to parents and childminders' business sustainability.
- In contrast, those not involved in delivering funded ELC all reported losses of business due to this –
- Of those who had been approved, but are waiting to be involved in delivering funded ELC 22.2% reported they had lost business due to not delivering funded ELC; 67.7% reported they had lost 1-2 pre-existing children from their settings; and 70% they had also lost 1-2 potential places (enquiries for funded hours);
 - Of those not involved in funded ELC 44.8% reported they had lost business as a result of not delivering funded ELC; 57.1% reported they had lost 1-2 pre-existing children from their settings and 41.3% had lost 3-4 pre-existing children from their settings; 54.5% had also lost 1-2 potential places (enquiries for funded hours) and 40.9% had lost 3-4 potential places.

In addition to duplicative scrutiny and quality assurance within ELC, much uncertainty remains in this area. This could very quickly have a much wider effect. At the time of writing –

- it is unclear what form of scrutiny and quality assurance will replace the previous inspection function of Education Scotland as a result of the independent expert group on Education Reform's ongoing review;
- the Scottish Government recently consulted on the creation of the new National Care Service (NCS) including potential qualification or training requirements, new standards, quality assurance and scrutiny. While ELC is not included within the scope of the NCS, SCMA's community childminders are involved in delivering children's social care which is within the scope of the NCS;
- the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2021/22 also includes commitments to extend ELC to one-year-olds and to develop a new system of wraparound school-aged childcare (SAC), both of which could require new systems of quality assurance and scrutiny to be developed to support public accountability³.

For childcare providers following one system of quality assurance, including guidance, frameworks and standards (i.e. nurseries following ELC guidance or SAC providers following SAC guidance) this is less of an issue, **but many childminders operate a mixed business model which may involve elements of private arrangements, funded ELC placements, SAC (before and/**

or after school) placements and community childminding placements. Childminders are already being disproportionately affected and finding their workloads unsustainable due to bureaucracy. For additional context, the majority of childminders are sole workers, they are required to meet and maintain the same standards as other providers, and are expected (in some local authority areas) to provide the same levels of paperwork whether or not they have children placed in their setting and also the same levels of paperwork regardless of the proportion of hours they are delivering is a small or large number. But unlike nurseries they do not have teams of staff (practitioners, managers, finance/admin and quality improvement officers) to support them. In simple terms during the day their sole focus is on practice delivery and everything else has to be done by them individually, unpaid, in their own time in the evenings or at weekends (cleaning their settings, undertaking professional learning, documenting quality assurance, keeping up-to-date with the latest guidance, administration, finance, liaising with parents, marketing etc). As self-employed business owners childminders also have to absorb the cost of undertaking training and qualifications themselves, although some local authorities do contribute towards partner providers' CPL costs.

It would simply not be credible to expect childminders to absorb further increases in workload and an alternative approach has to be developed in which we maintain quality assurance, but in a lighter-touch, joined-up and more proportionate manner.



Parental Choice

The expansion of ELC and the delivery of 1140 by 2020 has been a flagship policy aimed at closing the attainment gap. Central to ELC expansion has been the desire to increase parental choice and flexibility for childcare. Linked to this, the Scottish Government recently commissioned and published independent research, undertaken by Ipsos/MORI, which has highlighted a range of additional benefits which childminding has on outcomes for children and families in comparison to nursery and other forms of childcare. It is clear that childminding extends beyond 'just' a form of childcare - and is viewed as a vital form of family support.⁵

The Scottish Government's commitments to extend funded ELC to one year-olds and to develop a new system of wraparound SAC will be major undertakings which will also seek to increase parental choice. **In simple terms, we believe childminding has a critical role in the delivery of existing and future Scottish Government policy ambitions and in increasing parental choice, but childminders' ability to do so will be severely impaired and parental choice reduced if a step-change in action is not taken now.**

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Taken together, SCMA's 2021 audit of local authority provision of funded ELC along with the findings from the two accompanying surveys of parents and childminders provide a considerable body of 3-point triangulated data regarding the varying levels of inclusion of childminders in funded ELC delivery across Scotland. As highlighted earlier, this work provides a snapshot of both where we are in 2021 and of progress after five years of national and local implementation activity. SCMA has been, and remains, very supportive of the aims of ELC policy and, in particular, of its aim to help close the attainment gap in Scotland. However, significant challenges have been experienced with the implementation of this policy which have had an adverse effect on the sustainability of the childminding workforce. The childminding workforce has declined by 26.4% (1457 childminders) in the last 5 years, accelerating in parallel to ELC expansion, with reductions in childminder numbers experienced in every local authority area in Scotland. This, in turn, continues to reduce parental choice.

While recognising some encouraging progress has been made since our ELC Audit in 2019, the problems for childminding were deeply embedded before COVID-19 and have worsened during the pandemic. We, therefore, believe a step change in action from the Scottish Government is now required to safeguard this unique form of childcare and family support to enable more families in Scotland to benefit from childminding; to increase parental choice, and to contribute to the delivery of the Scottish Government's existing and future childcare policy ambitions - including within the Programme for Government 2021/22.

Recommendations:

The gap between the development of national standards and consistent local implementation:

1. **The principle of Provider Neutrality is not working in practice. This principle should be replaced as a matter of urgency, to incorporate a minimum childcare provider mix which all local authorities must meet, guaranteeing equitable opportunity to participate in funded ELC delivery (and taking into account remote and rural challenges).** All 32 local authorities should be required to report on this and to evidence annually their equitable inclusion of childminders and other childcare providers alongside their own provision. If the principle of Provider Neutrality is to be maintained, then it is essential that the Scottish Government and local authority representative bodies accept responsibility to ensure this is implemented fairly, equitably and consistently and that local authorities who fail to implement this principle in practice are held to account. If the Scottish Government is unable to guarantee this, the Scottish Government should take responsibility for developing an approach of affirmative action or special measures, 'Childminder Plus', in which it will take national responsibility for setting, monitoring and delivering meaningful annual increases in childminder inclusion in funded ELC delivery to redress the current imbalance.
2. **It is clear that much work remains to be done in ensuring all local authorities promote childminding equitably to parents, alongside local authority nursery provision, as an option for receiving their funded ELC entitlement. While the promotion and encouragement of good practice has been the favoured approach to date, this has not been working as much as hoped and there is a need for the Scottish Government to step in, to move beyond encouragement to requiring and ensuring that this now happens.**

The flexibility of ELC funded hours offered to parents:

3. Triangulated data from SCMA's 2021 ELC audit and accompanying snapshot surveys of parents and childminders has found significant concern about the lack of flexibility in funded ELC offers made to parents (and other providers). Future offers of funded ELC need to become more flexible and based more on parental need rather than developed from a preferred nursery operating perspective.
4. Building on the data already gathered by our audit and snapshot surveys, we believe that there would be value from a public accountability and scrutiny perspective, for a specific follow-up audit to be undertaken independently (by Audit Scotland or the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee) examining the flexibility of the funded hours offered to parents, given the loss of public expenditure which could arise if the current practice, in some areas, of allocating fixed 10-hour days to parents - regardless of their need and preference - and for the ease of local authority nursery administration and operation, is replicated widely around Scotland.
5. We recognise the small size of the snapshot survey of parents, but some of the findings are of concern, these are supported by the separate audit, childminders' survey, and our organisational experience in practice and we would recommend that the Scottish Government conducts a larger-scale survey of parents on their experiences of funded ELC to strengthen the evidence in this area, repeating questions asked in our snapshot survey of parents

Bureaucracy linked to ELC expansion:

6. Urgent, and immediate, action is required by the Scottish Government to reduce the level of bureaucracy associated with ELC expansion. The Scottish Government should undertake an urgent review of the wider scrutiny landscape BEFORE creating any additional scrutiny through Education Reform, the National Care Service and the development of the Programme for Government's commitments to extend ELC to one year-olds and to develop a new system of wraparound school aged childcare.
7. The Scottish Government should work with SCMA, the Care Inspectorate, Association of Directors of Education, COSLA and SCMA in reducing the duplicative quality assurance systems, nationally and locally, which have arisen as a result of ELC expansion with a view to streamlining, increasing consistency, standardising data capture and reporting which reflect childminder settings.
8. ELC standards and frameworks should be adapted, with childminding-specific versions developed with input from SCMA.
9. The Scottish Government should commission SCMA to work with statutory stakeholders to develop standardised documentation and templates to help reduce bureaucracy and which support the participation of professional childminders in delivering funded ELC.

Childminding workforce: recruitment and retention:

10. SCMA is currently planning to partner with local authorities to deliver joint demographically-targeted recruitment campaigns in remote and rural areas facing acute recruitment and retention challenges in childminding. This will just be the first step of a wider programme of work required to safeguard and develop a more sustainable childminding workforce to support national policy ambitions and parental choice – including further targeted extension into urban areas. Recognising it's national interests in ELC, increasing parental choice and the Programme for Government commitments to extend funded ELC to one-year-olds and to develop of new system of wraparound SAC, in which childminding will play a vital role, the Scottish Government should also contribute financially to support the extension of planned SCMA workforce and recruitment activity aimed at bringing more new entrants into the childminding workforce in the short, medium and long term.
11. SCMA is also actively exploring the potential development of a mentoring network, tapping into the experience within our membership, and matching experienced childminders with those coming into the workforce to provide support, to strengthen skills and knowledge acquisition and transfer, to reduce isolation and to support recruitment and retention within the childminding workforce. The Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland should consider providing financial support to enable SCMA to pilot and evaluate this initiative. The Scottish Government has previously funded and is currently funding recruitment activities within the wider ELC sector which are not childminding-specific. By providing funding to support targeted childminding-specific recruitment and retention activity (as detailed in recommendations 10 and 11) this would help to provide more parity of support between nurseries and childminding.

Eligible Two's uptake

12. The Scottish Government should review the uptake of funded hours in eligible two-year-olds, as a matter of urgency, and implement measures to increase the use of childminders for this priority group, particularly as a pre-cursor to the expansion of ELC downwards to include one-year-olds.

REFERENCES

1. Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Scottish Government, 2014
2. A Blueprint for 2020: Expansion of Early Learning & Childcare in Scotland, Scottish Government, October 2016
3. A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22, Scottish Government, September 2021
4. Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Delivery Progress Report, Improvement Service, September 2021
5. Perceptions of the impact of childminding services on child, parent and family outcomes, Scottish Government, September 2021
6. Early Learning & Childcare Audit 2019, Scottish Childminding Association, October 2019
7. National Day Nurseries Association 18/19 Workforce Survey Scotland, NDNA, August 2019
8. Implications of Labour Markets for the Social Care Workforce, Ekosgen, Scottish Government, 2019
9. Early Learning & Childcare Statistics, Care Inspectorate
10. #TellSCMA: Childminding & You Survey 2020, SCMA, May 2020 (unpublished)
11. Childminding on the Edge: SCMA Response to Scottish Government Consultation on 'Action Plan: A Vibrant Childminding Sector in Scotland', September 2020
12. Our Commitment to Childminding in Scotland, Scottish Government, January 2021
13. Changing the Narrative: Strengthening Childminding, Supporting Families and Increasing Choice – SCMA Strategy 2021-24, SCMA, May 2021
14. SCMA Response to Scottish Government Consultation – Reform of the SQA and Education Scotland: Expert Panel and Advisory Group Draft Terms of Reference, September 2021
15. Independent Review of Scotland's Early Learning and Out of School Care Workforces, Scottish Government, 1 June 2015



Scottish
Childminding
Association

committed to quality childcare

Scottish Childminding Association
Argyll Court, Castle Business Park, Stirling, FK9 4TY
Tel: **01786 445377**
Email: **information@childminding.org**
childminding.org

The Scottish Childminding Association is a Company Limited by Guarantee, registered in Scotland.
Registered Charity No SC010489. Limited Company No 144696

All materials © Scottish Childminding Association April 2021



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

We acknowledge the support of the Scottish Government through a CYPFEIF and ALEC Fund Grant.