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Childminding
Association

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Early Learning & Childcare Audit 2022

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

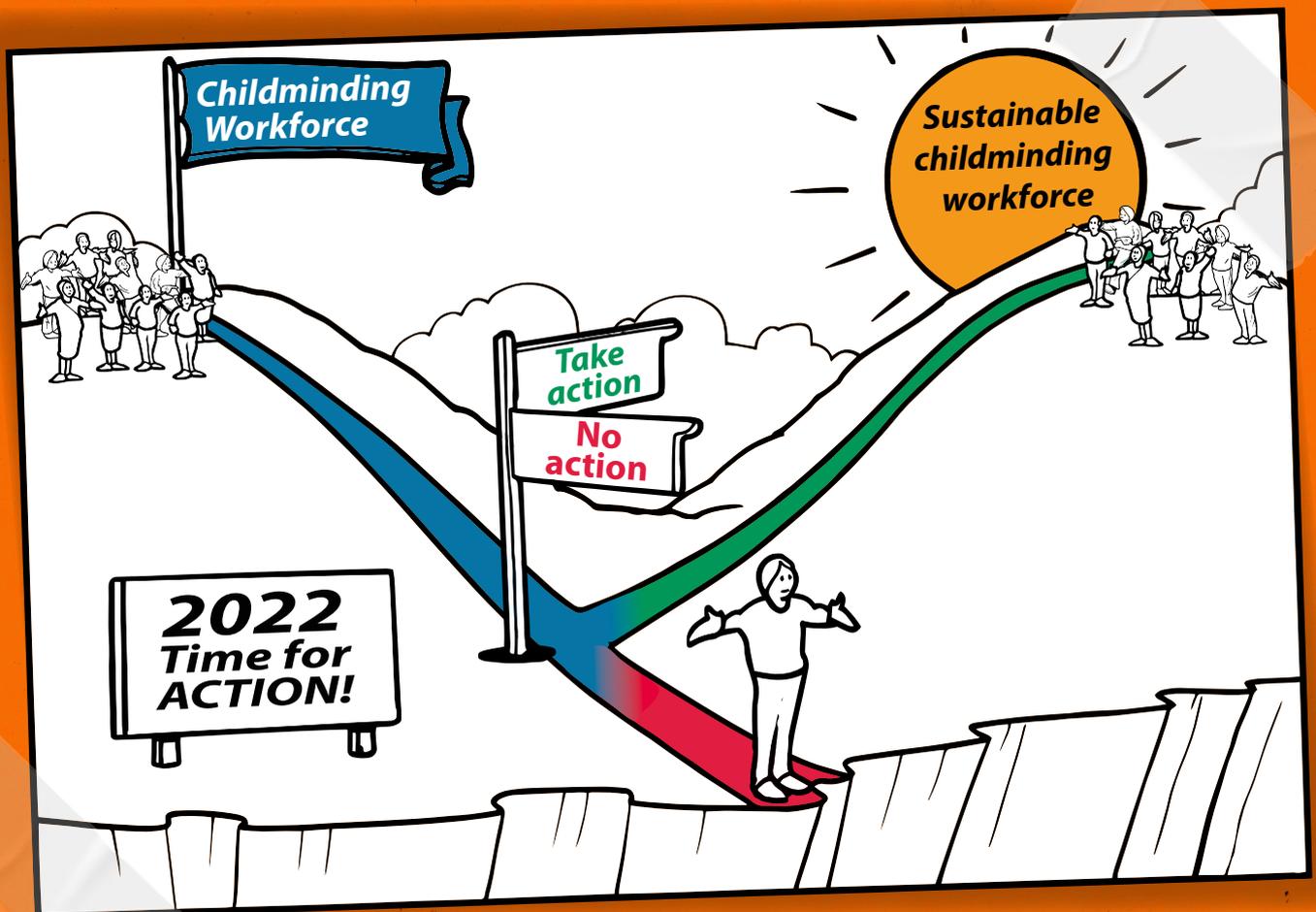


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DATA TABLES - available to download from the [SCMA website](#)

1. ELC Audit 2022 full data set - childminder involvement in funded ELC (eligible 2s and 3 to 4 year-olds)
2. Childminder experiences of delivering funded ELC (from #TellSCMA survey)
3. Changes in childminding workforce (2016 - 2022)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Decline of Childminding Workforce (actual and projected)

Our analysis of Care Inspectorate workforce data (July 2022) has found that during the six years of Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) expansion (from 2016), the childminding workforce has declined by 34.9%, with a **loss of 1926 childminding businesses**. Based on an average registration of 5.9 children per setting, this represents the **loss of 11,363 childminding places** for children and families.

For the first time SCMA has also undertaken some modelling to project the further decline of the childminding workforce in Scotland in the event that the Scottish Government (and others) do not act to prevent this decline. Based on current trend data, without intervention it is predicted that the decline in the childminding workforce in Scotland under ELC expansion could reach 42% by July 2023, 50% by July 2024 and 64% by July 2026 - **potentially a reduction of a further 1789 childminding businesses and 10,555 childminding places for children and families by July 2026**.

Number of Childminders Involved in Delivering Funded ELC

At a time when more progress was expected to have been made, the number of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC (Early Learning and Childcare) has reduced in both age groups in the last year (15 less childminders for eligible two year-olds and 18 less for three and four year-olds). This marginal decrease masks greater activity and movement at local authority level in which progress in increasing the number of childminders delivering funded ELC is being overtaken by those ceasing to do so (see pages 6-8), and adds to the growing evidence that an increasing number of childminders have already or are planning to stop delivering funded ELC and/or leave the childminding workforce due to increasing and unsustainable levels of bureaucracy, duplicative quality assurance and paperwork.

A worsening of childminders' experiences of delivering funded ELC is also reported.

Impact Assessments of Local ELC Expansion on Childminding

Six years into ELC expansion, 28 out of 32 local authorities have still not conducted an impact assessment of their local ELC expansion plans on local childminding businesses: only four local authorities have considered this (two through the procurement process and two through equality impact assessments).

ELC Offers, Blended Placements & Childminders' Business Sustainability

While the vast majority of local authorities confirmed that parents can choose to take their hours with a childminder (either in full or as part of a blended placement, split between a nursery and a childminder) for both eligible two year-olds and three to four year-olds, our childminder survey found that the highest responding group by far (70%) are still involved mostly in delivering funded ELC to three to four year-olds as part of blended placements. Only 15% of childminders delivering funded ELC who responded believed there is a 'strong' or 'very strong' match between local authority offers made to parents and their business needs and viability.

Only 7 out of 32 local authorities in this year's ELC audit confirmed that they consider whether the number of hours allocated to both providers within blended placements are of a high enough level to support their business sustainability.

Although there are some encouraging signs that more local authorities are starting to recognise their responsibility when making ELC offers and to consider whether the hours offered are of a high enough level to support both providers' business sustainability (see pages 9-10), this needs to be consistent across all areas to ensure childminders are not just offered the remainder after the bulk of the hours have been taken for a local authority's own nursery.

Local Quality Assurance (over and above National Quality Assurance)

A number of local authorities have developed or are actively planning their own systems of local quality assurance, over and above quality assurance already being undertaken nationally by the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland (and based on a mix of national standards and frameworks) and involving quality visits two to three times per year. This duplicative quality assurance at a national and local level means that childminders involved in funded ELC undergo inspection by the Care Inspectorate and have to undertake up to three forms of self-evaluation for three different organisations on their singular practice, each with their own requirements and documentation. As sole workers, this level of reporting and associated paperwork is not sustainable and needs urgent attention.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Funded Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) has been operating in Scotland for a number of years. While it is not a new policy as such, what has changed has been the level of the statutory entitlement of hours offered to parents. The Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 expanded the previous entitlement of funded ELC from 475 to 600 hours per year; then in 2016 the Scottish Government published its blueprint and commitment to almost doubling the number of hours of funded ELC to 1140 hours per year for all three, four and eligible two-year-olds by August 2020. This has been a significant undertaking and is understood to be the most generous entitlement in the U.K.



While the impact of increasing the statutory entitlement to 1140 hours on children's and family outcomes is undergoing ongoing evaluation, the phased expansion of funded ELC over a period of years has meant there is now an increasing body of evidence to support the evaluation of what has been working or not working with ELC implementation.

Linked to the delivery of '1140 by 2020' (or '1140 by 2021' as it became due to the pandemic), the Scottish Government has commissioned SCMA to undertake an annual, independent audit of local authorities' progress in involving childminders in delivering funded ELC. Our first three audits were undertaken and published from 2017-19. We didn't conduct an audit in 2020 due to the pandemic, but reintroduced this in 2021 when we published a comprehensive document providing both a snapshot of where we were last year, plus an overview of five years' national and local implementation activity. That found that the childminding workforce had declined by 26% (1457 childminding businesses) during the expansion of ELC and delivery of 1140 by 2020. While SCMA is supportive of ELC policy, and in particular the intent to close the attainment gap,

we continue to have serious concerns about how the expansion of funded ELC has been implemented nationally and locally and the devastating effect this has had on the childminding workforce. The reasons for the decline are multi-factorial and include –

- the national drive to recruit additional staff into nurseries to support ELC expansion and the destabilising effect this has had on the sector;
- inequitable and inconsistent local implementation of national ELC policy (including local prioritisation of local authority nursery provision, low-level inclusion of childminders in funded ELC delivery at levels which support business sustainability and inequitable promotion of all childcare options to parents);
- duplicative quality assurance at a national and local level and a significant increase in bureaucracy and paperwork for childminders under ELC expansion; and
- the requirement for practitioner qualifications set against a backdrop of a long-standing, high-quality and ageing workforce.

Evidence has shown that the main current reason why childminders have left or are planning to leave the workforce is the increase in bureaucracy, duplicative quality assurance and paperwork – all of which have increased significantly during ELC expansion. While affecting childminders delivering funded ELC more acutely, this has also been impacting on the wider childminding workforce as the Care Inspectorate's Quality Framework which was developed to support the expansion of funded ELC is applicable to all childminders (not just those delivering funded ELC) and all childminders are also encouraged to follow related frameworks and standards such as the Health and Social Care Standards, Realising the Ambition and Out to Play etc. This cause is closely followed by many childminders not feeling able to compete with the scale of local authority nursery expansion to support the delivery of '1140 by 2020'.

SCMA has gathered considerable evidence to corroborate these statements and recently published a detailed [Childminding Evidence Paper](#) which provides a detailed overview of the evidence to date and which also underpins the current SCMA strategy, '[Changing the Narrative: Strengthening Childminding, Supporting Families & Increasing Choice](#)', launched in May 2021, midway through COVID-19 and at a time when few were looking forward, to promote recovery.

The SCMA ELC Audit 2022 is our fifth audit in six years and adds further to this body of evidence. The accompanying data is included in linked Excel spreadsheet - available to download from the [SCMA website](#).

METHODOLOGY

The SCMA ELC Audit seeks to capture data on local authorities' progress in involving childminders in delivering funded ELC. It captures data against two main indicators –

'Eligible Two Year-Olds'

(this is a priority group for the Scottish Government which aims to provide additional support for low-income families – approx. 25% of all two-year-olds); and

'Three to Four Year-Olds'

(this is a universal offering to parents of all three and four year-olds in Scotland).

An e-mail invitation to submit an audit return was sent to all 32 local authorities in Scotland on 16 August 2022, requesting returns based on childminders involved in funded ELC and children in their settings as at 1 August 2022. This initial invitation was followed up by further e-mail reminders and data capture was completed by 15 September 2022. Audit returns were received from all 32 local authorities.

In parallel to this data collection, SCMA also analysed the Care Inspectorate's ELC workforce data as at 31 July 2022.

In addition, and to complement the SCMA ELC Audit 2022, SCMA also undertook –

✓ the large-scale #TellSCMA Childminding & You Survey 2022 which explored childminders' in-depth experiences of inspection and quality assurance during ELC expansion to inform our response to the Scottish Government consultation on the Future of Inspection in ELC and School-age Childcare Services in Scotland and also captured up-to-date data on childminders' experiences of funded ELC;

✓ a snapshot survey of parents in late September 2022.

MAIN FINDINGS - SCMA ELC AUDIT 2022



NUMBER OF CHILDMINDERS INVOLVED IN DELIVERING FUNDED ELC

While it was hoped that progress would have been made in increasing the number of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC, the number of childminders involved in delivery has reduced in both age groups (eligible two year-olds and three to four year-olds).

SCMA ELC AUDIT 2022 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

ELIGIBLE TWO YEAR OLDS

	CHILDMINDERS APPROVED			CHILDMINDERS DELIVERING			CHILDREN PLACED WITH CHILDMINDERS		
	2021	2022	Change	2021	2022	Change	2021	2022	Change
Numbers	1174	1124	-50	168	153	-15	207	178	-29
Percentage	28.9	31.3	2.4	4.1	4.3	0.2			

THREE-FOUR YEAR OLDS

	CHILDMINDERS APPROVED			CHILDMINDERS DELIVERING			CHILDREN PLACED WITH CHILDMINDERS		
	2021	2022	Change	2021	2022	Change*	2021	2022	Change
Numbers	1182	1137	-45	709	691	-18	1558	1461	-97
Percentage	29.1	31.6	2.5	17.5	19.2	1.7			

*Please note that one local authority submitted an incomplete return which omitted the number of childminders currently delivering for three-four year olds. This noted that 28 childminders had been approved for this age group and that 35 three-four year olds are currently receiving funded ELC from childminders. Despite repeated reminders from the SCMA Team this figure was not provided. As such, we retained last year's total of 14 childminders delivering in this category. This could under-record the actual number involved in delivery, but we believe this total would still be in negative.

The figures provided only present a snapshot suggesting little change, but when considering these by local authority area a more detailed picture emerges. In the three to four year-old age group encouraging progress was made in bringing more childminders into delivering funded ELC, including Aberdeenshire Council who brought on a further 20 childminders and East Lothian Council with a further 13 childminders. In total, 75 additional childminders were brought into delivering funded ELC for three to four year-olds last year across Scotland.

However, this progress was overtaken by 93 childminders who had previously delivered funded ELC to this age group no longer doing so, resulting in a deficit total of -18 last year in the three to four year-old category. A similar pattern was experienced for eligible two year-olds, as an additional 29 childminders started delivering funded ELC to this age group, but this progress was overtaken by 44 childminders no longer doing so, resulting in a deficit of -15.

This is consistent with SCMA's repeat survey findings that a number of childminders who had been involved in delivering funded ELC are planning to stop or are no longer doing so and/or are leaving the childminding workforce due to the unsustainable level of bureaucracy, duplicative quality assurance and paperwork or as they no longer have any funded ELC children in their settings.

Either way, funded ELC has not been working for them. Linked to this, the findings of our recent #TellSCMA Childminding & You Survey 2022 reported on page 16 of this document should be of particular concern to the Scottish Government and parents/carers.



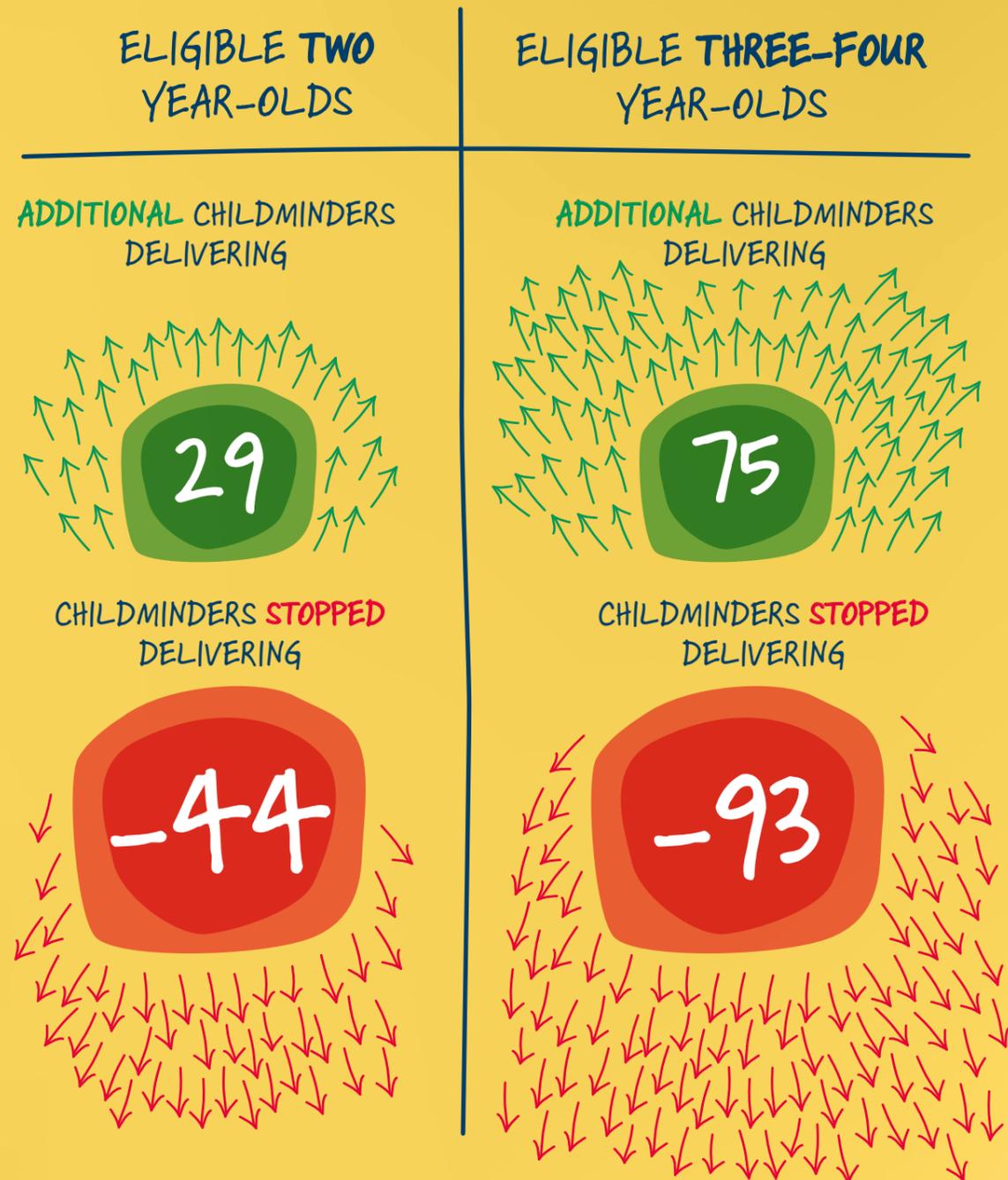
LOOKING BEHIND THIS HEADLINE DATA

At first glance, the percentages of childminders approved and involved in delivering funded ELC appear to have increased slightly, but as the childminding workforce is decreasing rapidly the percentages present higher as a proportion of a declining workforce – not due to progress in increasing involvement; in contrast the actual numbers of childminders involved in both age groups have decreased. Significant disparities continue to exist between the number of childminders approved to participate in funded ELC and those actually involved

in delivering funded ELC through hours provided by their local authority. Our earlier audits and survey data have indicated this has been influenced by a number of local authorities not promoting childminding equitably alongside their own nursery provision as an option for funded ELC to parents.

It is of concern that the numbers of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC have reduced as have the number of children receiving funded ELC in childminding settings.

SUMMARY OF CHANGE IN NUMBERS OF CHILDMINDERS DELIVERING FUNDED ELC 2021-22



IMPACT ASSESSMENTS OF LOCAL ELC EXPANSION ON CHILDMINDING

Six years into ELC expansion, 28 out of 32 local authorities have still not conducted an impact assessment of their local ELC expansion plans on local childminding businesses: only four local authorities have considered this (two through the procurement process and two through equality impact assessments).

ELC OFFERS, BLENDED PLACEMENTS & CHILDMINDERS' BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

A key finding within last year's SCMA 2021 audit and linked childminders' survey was that the top line reporting of the number of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC, as captured in local authority returns to the audit, did not capture how meaningfully childminders are being involved in delivering funded ELC. The childminders' survey found that those who were involved in delivering funded ELC were doing so mostly on the basis of delivering blended placements (hours split with local authority nurseries) for three to four year-olds and in a number of cases, the number of hours childminders received from local authorities were not enough to support their business sustainability.

The vast majority of local authorities (25+ out of 32), confirmed in this year's audit returns that parents can choose to take their hours with a childminder - either in full or as part of a blended placement for both eligible two year-olds and three to four year-olds. However, SCMA repeated last year's childminder survey questions within this year's wider-ranging #TellSCMA Childminding & You Survey 2022 and found that while small gains (4-5%) had been made in the number of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC for eligible two year-olds the highest responding group by far (70%) are still involved mostly in delivering funded ELC to three to four year-olds as part of blended placements.

Only 15% of childminders delivering funded ELC who responded believed there is a 'strong' or 'very strong' match between local authority offers made to parents and their business needs (this has decreased from 30% in 2021).

16% believed the hours they received were of a high enough level to support their business sustainability,

40% believed this to be a mix of 'high enough' and 'not high enough' (if delivering funded ELC for more than one child),

34% believed the hours were not high enough and 10% were undecided.

Only 7 out of 32 local authorities confirmed that they consider whether the number of hours allocated to both providers within blended placements are of a high enough level to support their business sustainability. While many simply state that this is down to parental choice, there are signs that more local authorities are

starting to recognise their responsibility when making ELC offers and to consider whether the hours offered are of a high enough level to support both providers' business sustainability, rather than childminders just being offered the remainder after the bulk of the hours have been taken for a local authority's own nursery.

BLENDED PLACEMENTS AND SUSTAINABLE OFFERS TO CHILDMINDERS

Examples of good practice which would benefit from wider replication and adoption by local authorities include:

★ **Midlothian Council** who provide a minimum of two sessions per week to both providers. While the minimum number of hours is variable depending on the setting's model of delivery, this minimum largely applies to other providers as well as local authority nurseries. In practice this minimum of two sessions can equate to one full day or one full day and a half day on a Friday.

★ **West Lothian Council** who previously allocated 1000 hours within blended placements to their local authority nurseries and only 140 hours to childminders. Childminders found this inequitable, the Council has responded positively and is currently piloting a model involving a minimum of two sessions for each provider (within which some childminders are receiving 500hrs and 700hrs per year).

LOCAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (OVER AND ABOVE NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE)



A number of local authorities have developed or are actively planning their own systems of local quality assurance, over and above quality assurance already being undertaken nationally (and based on a mix of national standards and frameworks including the National Standard, the Quality Framework, How Good is Our ELC and Realising the Ambition). Under ELC expansion the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland (at a national level), and local authorities (at a local level) have named roles in relation to quality assurance. As has been detailed repeatedly in a range of SCMA's outputs (most recently in our response to the Scottish Government consultation on the Future of Inspection in ELC and School-age Childcare Services in Scotland, October 2022

– see page 16) this, compounded with the failure of the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland to deliver a single/shared inspection and quality framework for ELC, has led to the emergence of duplicative systems of quality assurance at a national and local level. Childminders involved in funded ELC undergo inspection by the Care Inspectorate, have to undertake up to three forms of self-evaluation for three different organisations on their singular practice, and as we emerge from COVID-19 a number of local authorities have already started/are planning to undertake quality visits two to three times per year – with additional documentation to be completed in their own style in between – as well as quality assurance activity at a national level.

CHILDMINDERS' EXPERIENCES OF DELIVERING FUNDED ELC

Other findings within our childminders' survey questions repeated this year include –

- ✗ only 18% of childminders who responded believed there was a 'strong' or 'very strong' match between offers made by local authorities to parents and what parents had requested (compared to 36% in 2021)
- ✗ 71% of childminders who responded believed that funded hours offers need to become 'much more' or 'more' flexible (compared to 62% in 2021)
- ✗ only 16% of childminders who responded believed that their local authority had been 'very effective' or 'effective' in promoting childminding equitably to parents, alongside local authority nurseries and other forms of childcare, as an option for receiving their funded entitlement (compared to 23% in 2021)
- ✗ less than half of childminders who responded (47%) would recommend delivering funded ELC to other childminders (compared to 57% in 2021) and the number who would not recommend delivering funded hours has increased from 18% in 2021 to 33% in 2022.



Please note: the parallel snapshot parents' survey did not attract a high enough response to support meaningful comparison with last year's survey.



FURTHER DECLINE OF THE CHILDMINDING WORKFORCE

Analysis of Care Inspectorate workforce data (July 2022) has found that **the childminding workforce has now declined by 34.9% (1926 childminding businesses) since 2016 and during the six years of ELC expansion.** Based on an average registration of 5.9 children per setting this represents the loss of 11,363 childminding spaces for children and families;

The data also shows that this decline in the childminding workforce is accelerating. The workforce declined by 11.54% between July 2021 and July 2022 and while this figure presents higher as a proportion within the declining workforce, the annual change in the actual number of childminders in the workforce is worsening, as can be seen from the table below and the graph opposite.

CHILDMINDING WORKFORCE: ANNUAL & CUMULATIVE CHANGE SINCE 2016

	Number	Annual Change (n)	Annual Change (%)	Cumulative Change Since 2016	
				(n)	%
Jul-15	5502	-75	-1.3%		
Jul-16	5520	18	0.3%		
Jul-17	5328	-192	-3.5%	-192	-3.5%
Jul-18	5064	-264	-5.0%	-456	-8.3%
Jul-19	4768	-296	-5.8%	-752	-13.6%
Jul-20	4476	-292	-6.1%	-1044	-18.9%
Jul-21	4063	-413	-9.2%	-1457	-26.4%
Jul-22	3594	-469	-11.5%	-1926	-34.9%

Source: Early Learning and Childcare Statistics, Care Inspectorate



DECLINE OF CHILDMINDER WORKFORCE IN SCOTLAND DURING ELC EXPANSION (2016 -): ACTUAL AND PROJECTED (WITHOUT INTERVENTION)



	Jul-15	Jul-16	Jul-17	Jul-18	Jul-19	Jul-20	Jul-21	Jul-22	Jul-23	Jul-24	Jul-25	Jul-26
— Values	-1.34%	0.33%	-3.48%	-8.26%	-13.62%	-18.91%	-26.39%	-34.89%				
— Forecast								-34.89%	-42.24%	-49.59%	-56.94%	-64.28%
Declining size of the childminding workforce (in numbers)	5502	5520	5328	5064	4768	4476	4063	3594	3147	2699	2252	1805

These statistics are based on what is projected to happen if the Scottish Government (and others) do not intervene, as during the reporting periods of our earlier annual audits (2017-21) little national activity was focussed on, or priority given to, supporting childminder recruitment and addressing the issues which were adversely affecting retention within the workforce.

However, with decisive and urgent intervention this could change ...

LOOKING AHEAD

For the first time, SCMA has also undertaken some modelling to project the further decline of the childminding workforce in Scotland in the event that the Scottish Government (and others) do not act to prevent this.

Based on current trend data, and without intervention, it is predicted that the decline in the childminding workforce in Scotland under ELC expansion could reach 42% by July 2023, 50% by July 2024 and 64% by July 2026.

In real terms, this equates to the potential loss of a further 1789 childminding businesses and 10,555 childminding places for children and families by July 2026.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LAST YEAR

Since publishing our 2021 audit there have been a number of developments, most notably –

Rural Childminder Recruitment:

In summer 2021 SCMA received approaches from a number of local authorities in remote and rural areas, where recruitment challenges were more pronounced, seeking our help with childminder recruitment. These requests had been received directly and through last year's audit returns. We were happy to help, but realised a wider strategic response was required, so SCMA convened a National and Local Stakeholder Strategic Discussion on Childminder Recruitment & Retention in Remote & Rural Areas. This meeting was held on 11 November 2021, led by SCMA and representatives from 17 national and local organisations participated. This led to the establishment and launch, by March 2022, of the [Scottish Rural Childminding Partnership](#).

Led by SCMA with financial support from Highlands & Islands Enterprise, South of Scotland Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Government, and delivered in partnership with ten remote and rural local authorities, the pilot aimed to support local community and economic development by recruiting 100 childminders in remote and rural areas where they were most needed. It also enabled us to test a childminding-specific and supported recruitment model which could be extended more widely, using a demographically-targeted digital and radio marketing campaign. All new childminders recruited via the campaign would be provided with a fully funded support package, including:

- ✓ SCMA's childminding-specific Induction Support Programme and one-to-one support before and throughout the Care Inspectorate registration process
- ✓ a start-up package of three SCMA childminding-specific Continuing Professional Learning courses
- ✓ a £750 start-up grant

This has been a collaborative pilot in which local authorities have identified target areas and SCMA provided our childminding-specific expertise to develop and deliver the recruitment campaign and support childminders throughout the process. While this pilot is still ongoing, very encouraging progress has been made – 17 new childminders have already completed registration with the Care Inspectorate, a further 23 have applied for registration and another 40+ have completed or are about to complete our Induction Support Programme and are working their way through the system. New childminding businesses are also being established in areas where local authorities had previously been unable to recruit.

This pilot has attracted wider interest including from urban and mixed local authorities and discussions are ongoing with Scottish Government and others to explore potential to extend this model.

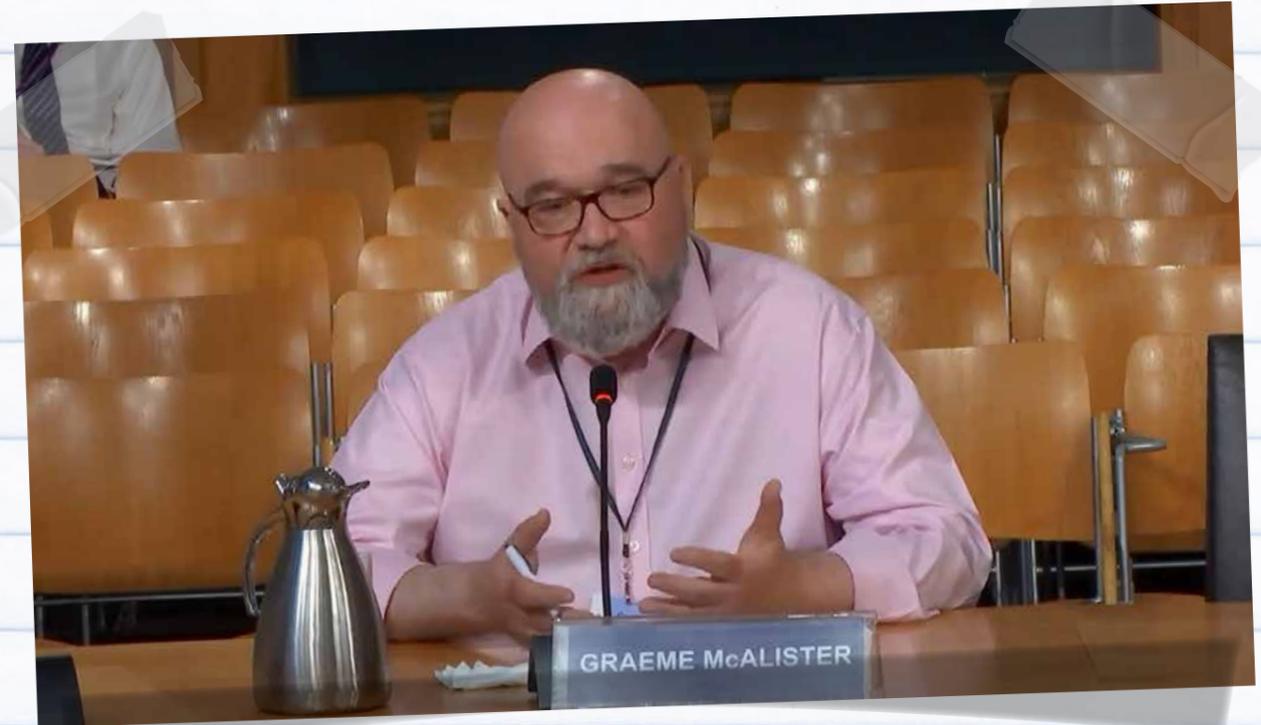
Ipsos/MORI Workforce Research:

In response to a recommendation in the SCMA ELC Audit 2019, the Scottish Government had commissioned independent research into the declining trends within the childminding workforce to complement earlier SCMA quantitative survey data. This qualitative research was delayed by the pandemic, but was conducted during 2021 and published in April 2022. This largely reaffirmed our findings with concerns about bureaucracy and paperwork dominating the responses running through groups of interviewees (including those considering becoming a childminder, recent entrants to the childminding workforce, and those mid-career considering leaving and also those who had left the workforce).



Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA)

Scottish Parliament Evidence Sessions on ELC



SCMA was invited to give oral evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children & Young People Committee in May 2022 and to the Finance & Public Administration Committee in June 2022 on the impact of ELC expansion on the childminding workforce. On 4 October 2022, the Finance & Public Administration wrote to the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney MSP, with a summary of their findings which stated –

*"In their written submission to the Committee, the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) noted a 26% decline in the number of childminders over the last 5 years. Graeme McAlister of the SCMA explained that the main reason behind childminders leaving the workforce is the significant increase in bureaucracy and paperwork and the duplicative quality assurance at national and local levels, which has become unsustainable. Other areas of concern for the SCMA are the limited number of hours offered to childminders as part of blended placements and the lack of understanding and promotion of childminding as an option for funded ELC. The SCMA calls for a "proportionate, joined up and light touch" quality assurance process. This is echoed by Early Years Scotland, who calls for overall simplification of the process, a single inspection body for ELC and more active engagement with the PVI sector during the early stages. Despite assurances received from COSLA that there is no squeeze on partner provision at national level and changes are linked primarily to parent-demand, research commissioned by the Scottish Government confirmed that training, administrative demands and inspections are lead causes of the current decline in the childminding workforce. The Director of Early Learning and Childcare advised the Committee that the Scottish Government will be consulting on a shared inspection framework for the early learning and childcare sector as a whole, however, this work is at very early stage. **Given the decline in private and voluntary settings, and the challenges facing the wider labour market, the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government prioritises their work on the ELC inspection framework as a matter of urgency in order to ensure the sustainability of the sector**".*

Scottish Government Consultation on the Future of Inspection and SCMA Response (informed by large-scale SCMA 2022 survey)



In response to concerns from the sector about the adverse impact of duplicative quality assurance the Scottish Government consulted over the summer on the Future of Inspection in Early Learning & Childcare and School-age Childcare (SAC) Services in Scotland, which proposed a single/shared inspection based on a single/shared quality framework for ELC and SAC.

To inform our response to this consultation SCMA conducted the large-scale and in-depth #TellSCMA Childminding & You Survey 2022 in September and October 2022. This attracted 1263 responses (a 45% response level) and almost 1000 free-text comments on the future of inspection – a very high response for a survey and demonstrating how important this is to childminders and families around Scotland.

Our survey found that the current system of inspection and quality assurance has largely not been working for childminding, an industry of duplicative quality assurance has built up nationally and locally under ELC expansion, and that there has been a loss of focus on the child - with greater emphasis being placed on good documentation rather than good practice. It also captured an extensive range of evidence of the adverse impact of bureaucracy, duplicative quality assurance and paperwork on the childminding workforce including –

- ✗ 82% of partner provider childminders who responded reported that delivering funded ELC has resulted in a significant or very significant increase in paperwork;
- ✗ 48% of all childminders (and 66% of partner provider childminders) who responded are now doing an additional 5+ hours of unpaid paperwork per week; and 27% of all childminders (and 36% of partner provider childminders) who responded are now doing an additional 7+ hours (a day or more) of unpaid paperwork per week to support this;
- ✗ 43% of all childminders (and 53% of partner providers) who responded have already had to or believe they will have to reduce their practice to support this; with 86% of all (and 93% of partner providers) who have had to / will have to do so by 3 or more hours (half a day) per week; and 34% of all (and 42% of partner providers) by 7 or more hours (a day) per week;

As a consequence of these pressures, 53% of partner provider childminders who responded believe it unlikely or very unlikely that they will still be delivering funded ELC in two to three years' time if the level of paperwork is not reduced.



Childminder preferences for the future of inspections and Quality Assurance

The survey results showed that most childminders would prefer:

- ✓ a more childminding-specific single/shared inspection, with greater consistency between inspectors;
- ✓ a simpler, shorter and higher-level quality-assurance framework based on a rationalisation and reduction of related frameworks (including the Quality Framework, How Good Is Our ELC, Realising the Ambition, Out to Play etc) and much-reduced outcomes requiring to be recorded;
- ✓ more support for childminders to undertake self-evaluation.



Projected Childminding Workforce Decline 2023-26:

SCMA's workforce projections (November 2022), included earlier within this audit report predict that the decline in the childminding workforce under ELC expansion could reach 50% by July 2024 and 64% by July 2026 without intervention.

Childminders' Financial Sustainability

Within the #TellSCMA Childminding & You Survey 2022 we also captured a range of data from members on their financial sustainability, examining cost pressures including the current cost of living crisis, the Real Living Wage, sustainable rates and where their businesses are after COVID-19. This is intended to build on the Scottish Government's Financial Health Check (August 2021), which found that childminding and school-age childcare services had been affected the most financially by the pandemic, and to inform a range of Scottish Government work streams. Preliminary analysis would indicate that many childminding businesses are experiencing a range of acute cost pressures and we are aiming to publish a report based on these findings in December 2022.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout ELC expansion SCMA has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to undertake annual independent audits of local authority progress in including childminders in ELC delivery and we have worked constructively to establish the wider evidence base on childminding and the challenges experienced.

While some local authorities have been supportive and inclusive, too many have not and acute shortages of childminders are now being experienced around the country. Many childminders have found it difficult to compete with the scale of local authority nursery expansion (in most cases undertaken without first assessing the impact of such expansion on local childminding businesses) and have experienced difficulties in getting involved in delivering funded ELC.

Childminders have also experienced other in-built inequalities including local authorities being responsible for overseeing local ELC expansion whilst also being a direct service provider in their own right, and inequity in the funding for ELC which has enabled local authorities to pay their nursery staff who are delivering funded ELC the Real Living Wage, whereas the funding that childminders and Private, Voluntary & Independent (PVI) settings have received has not enabled them to pay themselves the Real Living Wage.

In parallel, there has been a significant increase in bureaucracy, duplicative quality assurance and paperwork alongside a layering on of standards and frameworks - each which with their own detailed outcomes reporting requirements.

As predominantly sole workers, the impact on childminders has been more acute and has affected them disproportionately and affects the whole childminding workforce – not just those involved in funded ELC delivery. As a professional membership organisation we are supportive of quality assurance, but believe this must become more joined-up, lighter-touch and proportionate to childminding.

In our SCMA ELC Audit 2021 we noted that the findings “may make stark, challenging or uncomfortable reading”. A year later, and with little substantive national progress, it should not be surprising that the SCMA ELC Audit 2022 findings are even starker – particularly for a flagship national policy which has been plagued by problems, and unintended consequences, due to the manner in which it has been implemented nationally and locally.

Although some progress is being made in bringing more childminders into delivering funded ELC, this is being overtaken by higher losses in childminders who were previously delivering funded ELC and are now ceasing to do so and adds to the increasing evidence that childminders have been or are planning to leave the childminding workforce due to increasing and unsustainable levels of bureaucracy and paperwork. The level of paperwork and bureaucracy is also the main reason putting more childminders off from wanting to get involved – despite both those involved and not involved in delivering funded ELC recognising how important it can be to their business sustainability.

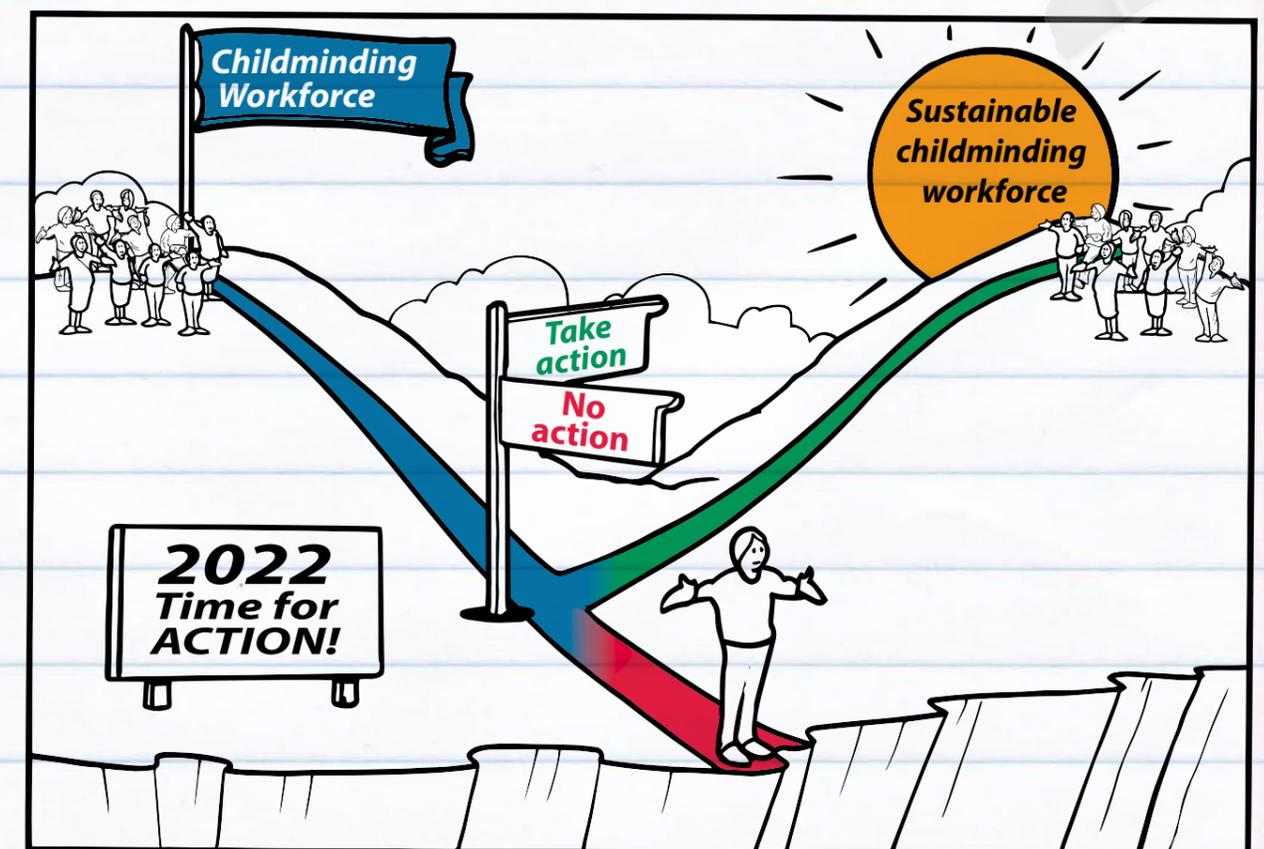
Throughout the six years of ELC expansion the childminding workforce has declined by 34.9% (in real terms with the loss of 1926 childminding businesses and 11,363 childminding places lost for children and families). It is also now projected that if the Scottish Government (and others) do not intervene, the childminding workforce decline under ELC expansion could reach 42% by July 2023, 50% by July 2024 and 64% by July 2026 (and with the loss of up to another 1789 childminding businesses and 10,555 childminding places for children and families by July 2026 on top of those already lost).

This latest data, coupled with the recent call from the Scottish Parliament's Finance & Public Administration Committee that the Scottish Government needs to prioritise addressing the issues of duplicative quality assurance and paperwork as a matter of urgency and recent SCMA survey data which found that 53% of childminders involved in delivering funded ELC will not still be doing so in two to three years' time if the paperwork doesn't reduce, couldn't make it any clearer that there is a very limited time frame for the Scottish Government (and others) to take more responsibility and to act decisively and quickly.

This year we will keep the recommendations in our 2022 ELC audit short –

- **ON RETENTION:** that the recommendations in our recent detailed response to the Scottish Government consultation on the Future of Inspection in ELC and SAC settings (including the need for the Scottish Government to convene an emergency national summit of all involved stakeholders to agree what duplicative aspects of quality assurance can be reduced or, indeed, removed quickly; and to plan how we can reduce and rationalise the number of related frameworks and outcomes reporting, and against an agreed timescale for change) should be implemented in full; and
- **ON RECRUITMENT:** in parallel the Scottish Government should prioritise, as a matter of urgency, working with SCMA to scale-up and extend childminding-specific recruitment nationally in areas where childminders are needed. In addition to advocating evidence-based change, SCMA has demonstrated our ability and willingness to lead collaboratively with others.

The Scottish Rural Childminding Partnership, while still ongoing, has piloted an evidence-based, demographically-targeted and childminding-specific supported method of recruiting childminders into the sector which is showing promising results. However, based on a target of recruiting up to 100 childminders against the background of a loss of almost 2000 childminders in the last six years and with further projected losses it couldn't be clearer that this needs to be scaled-up nationally **as a matter of urgency**. This pilot has also generated much interest in becoming a childminder, with potential to build on this nationally. It is also actively demonstrating that despite the challenges our workforce faces we can attract new recruits, childminding can offer a very fulfilling career and if we can urgently address the problems with bureaucracy, duplicative quality assurance and paperwork there is still an opportunity to develop and grow a sustainable childminding workforce in all parts of Scotland.



WHY IS THE AVAILABILITY OF CHILDMINDERS IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES?

We recognise that there may be some within local authorities who would not see it as a great loss if local childminding businesses continue to go out of business, as they may believe that they have capacity to meet any resultant childcare needs within their own nurseries. If this were to happen parental choice would reduce further and undermine the intent of ELC policy which was to increase childcare choice.

The primary focus of childcare policy in Scotland in recent years has been on delivering '1140 by 2020' and doubling the statutory entitlement of funded childcare. What has not been recognised within this is that all forms of childcare are not the same.

Childminding is a unique high-quality form of childcare which consistently achieves higher ratings across all quality criteria, through independent inspection by the Care Inspectorate, than Daycare of Children Services (local authority and private nurseries combined). Childminding is delivered in a home setting with small numbers of children, low adult-to-child ratios which enable more personalised support, and in which children of different ages learn and play together - which has been shown to support a range of aspects of development. Childminding also supports children from age 0-12 (or 16 in the case of children with additional support needs) and has been recognised as providing wider family support not available elsewhere. We have previously estimated that only around 27% of children in childminding settings are within the scope of funded ELC (eligible two, plus all three and four year-olds). In addition to children within this range, childminders support babies, one year-olds, non-eligible two year-olds and 50% of the children in childminding settings are of school age (5-12/16).

If childminders go out of business due to problems with the implementation of funded ELC policy this

has much wider implications – particularly for the Scottish Government's Programme for Government commitments to extend funded ELC down to one year-olds, all two-year-olds and to develop a new system of wraparound school-age childcare. **In simple terms and based on the current trajectory of our workforce trends we will not have the childcare providers available to deliver these policy ambitions.**

The evidence in support of the need for change is continuing to increase and there is a pressing need for the Scottish Government to take greater responsibility and ownership (with others) in redressing the problems that the implementation of the doubling of the statutory entitlement has caused to childminders, as non-statutory childcare providers.

The choice is also very clear – to allow childminding to become less and less available, and potentially disappear altogether as a form of childcare in Scotland, or to act decisively and intervene before it is too late to safeguard childminding for children and families around Scotland. The clock is ticking ...

Graeme McAlister

Chief Executive
November 2022

LINKS

SCMA ELC AUDIT 2022

- DATA TABLES - available to download from the [SCMA website](#)
 1. ELC Audit 2022 full data set – childminder involvement in funded ELC (eligible 2s and 3 to 4 year-olds)
 2. Childminder experiences of delivering funded ELC (from #TellSCMA survey)
 3. Changes in childminding workforce (2016 – 2022)
- [SCMA response to SG consultation on Future of Inspection in ELC and SAC services in Scotland FINAL.pdf \(childminding.org\)](#)
- [TellSCMA Childminding and You Survey 2022 Survey Report No 1 Future of Inspection FINAL.pdf](#)
- [SCMA Childminding Evidence Paper Aug2022 FINAL.pdf](#)



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