



Scottish Childminding Association

# Childminding on Non-Domestic Premises: Survey Report

May 2025



## Scottish Childminding Association | About Us

SCMA is the only organisation in Scotland dedicated to supporting all aspects of childminding. We provide a diverse range of childminding-specific support and professional services for our members and the wider childminding community.

Crucially, we provide a voice for professional childminding in Scotland. By working in partnership with the Scottish Government, local authorities and others, we help influence the development and implementation of policy and standards to ensure they are well informed by the experiences of professional childminders in Scotland.

We are a membership organisation and service provider with charitable status.

SCMA wears a lot of different hats; but we have one purpose - to support registered childminders in Scotland to provide the best service they can for children and their families.

### Our Vision

SCMA's vision is to create a sustainable childminding workforce to provide access to childcare and support families across Scotland – including in rural and island areas as well as urban communities. We do this by focusing on five key areas:



#### **Membership**

Providing our childminder members with the right support and access to resources to meet both their personal and professional needs.



#### **Representation, Policy and Influencing**

Representing and advocating for our members at the highest levels on the matters that are important to them – including ensuring that they are treated equally alongside other childcare providers.



#### **Workforce, Learning and Quality**

Leading work to reverse the declining trends within our workforce and ensure business sustainability. Supporting childminder members at all career stages to ensure they are up to date with childminding practice, policy, inspection and quality improvement.



#### **Families and Communities**

Providing family support, advocating for childminder inclusion in supporting all - age childcare models and expanding our delivery of services for vulnerable and low-income families and children with additional support needs.



#### **Value of childminding**

Increasing the value attached to childminding by others by raising the profile of and increasing understanding about the unique benefits of childminding with parents, policy makers and other childcare providers and by challenging outdated negative perceptions.

Read more about SCMA, our Strategy and Values at [\*\*childminding.org/about-us\*\*](https://childminding.org/about-us).

# Childminding on Non-Domestic Premises | Survey Report

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## Main Findings

This report is based on an online survey of SCMA childminder members, conducted from 11 February – 7 March 2025. Responses were received from 35% of our members (857 childminding businesses) from across all 32 local authorities, representing 29% of the full childminding workforce.

### **Option to Deliver Childminding on Non-Domestic Premises in Scotland**

- **Just over half of respondents (53%) were in favour of childminders having the option to deliver their service on non-domestic premises;** 24% were not in favour and 23% responded 'Don't know'.
- **Of those in favour, 71% believe that if this option were to be available it should be based on childminders being able to deliver their service as a mix of from home and also from non-domestic premises;** 20% believed that this should be wholly from non-domestic premises.

Main reasons given by those **in support** of the option:

- Opportunity to work with other childminders/reduce loneliness (81%)
- It could provide greater flexibility (76%)
- Increased space / potential for larger service (69%)
- May be particularly suitable for after-school care (63%)
- Current setting size and ratios are limiting (54%)
- Potential to strengthen my business sustainability (40%)
- I would prefer this to delivering from home (18%)

Main reasons given by those **not in support** of the option:

- Childminding is based on and delivered from the home, replicates the family environment and could not be delivered effectively in other locations (94%)
- It would dilute the unique selling point of the nurturing, home-based, small-group nature of childminding (81%)
- Childminding involves a high element of outdoors activity which could be lost if delivered on non-domestic premises (58%)
- It could involve additional insurance complexity and cost (55%)
- It could involve additional cost to hire external facilities (52%)
- Difficult to maintain the service if delivered with other childminders and one or more no longer wants to (48%)
- Difficult to maintain the registration requirements of the setting if delivered in a shared / multi-use facility (46%)
- **Respondents expressed mixed views regarding the potential this may have on their business sustainability:** 54% of those in favour believed it would increase their own business sustainability, while 52% of those against believe others delivering childminding on non-domestic premises in their area could have an adverse effect on their business sustainability.
- **Respondents also expressed mixed views regarding whether they believed it would be possible to replicate and maintain the nurturing, home-based nature of childminding, including the high element of outdoors play and activity, on non-domestic premises** (34% not possible, 29% partially, 28% fully)

- **Only 28% of all respondents would be personally interested in delivering on non-domestic premises:** 43% were not personally interested and 29% didn't know or would need to know more about how this could work.
- **Almost half of respondents (47%) believe that having this option would not have any impact on their future career intentions:** 30% of respondents believed this may increase how long they continue childminding and 23% believed this development, if it were to occur, could cause them to leave childminding earlier.

### **Legal Definition(s) of Childminding**

- **81% of all respondents believe that the term "looking after" within the existing legal definition of childminding is outdated and should be changed to reflect that childminding is a registered form of childcare.**
- **65% of all respondents believe that "on domestic premises" should remain within the existing legal definition of childminding** (to maintain the unique nature of childminding and linked to non-payment of business rates).
- **52% of all respondents would prefer that if childminding on non-domestic premises is permitted - a separate, new, additional legal category of 'Childminding on Non-Domestic Premises' should be created to support this (similar to in England) to make this distinct from childminding:** 27% believed the existing legal definition and category of childminding should be changed and widened to include delivery on either domestic or non-domestic premises.

### **Possible Changes to Categories of Childcare Practitioners in Remote and Island Communities**

- **38% of all respondents believe another new (non-childminding) category of 'rural childcare practitioner' should be developed to help with this:** 33% believe childminding should be changed to also permit delivery on non-domestic settings to help with this, and 29% didn't know / had no opinion.
- **71% of all respondents believed that local impact assessments must be undertaken prior to establishing alternate new forms of provision, so as to avoid adversely affecting local childminding business sustainability.**

### **Ratios**

- **Childminders' views on current childminding ratios and flexibility:**
  - Greater individual flexibility within agreed ratios and maximum registration numbers could reduce the need for variations (55%).
  - The ratios are limiting and would benefit from being changed (51%).
  - If not having any school-age children in my setting at the time, the number of pre-school children that I can care for at any one time could be higher than at present (47%).
- **Childminders' experiences of applying to the Care Inspectorate for variations on ratios (in terms of time experienced in having a variation approved, the level of information required and their overall experience) were mostly neutral or positive,** but approx. 1 in 4 respondents reported negative experiences.

## Background and Context

SCMA has been and continues to be involved in a number of discussions at a national level about whether the legislation and regulations should be changed in Scotland to permit childminding to also be delivered from non-domestic premises i.e. village hall, community centre etc. This is in response to a series of developments:

### 1. Shortage of Childcare in Remote, Rural and Islands Areas

There is an acute shortage of childcare in many remote, rural and island communities around Scotland. A number of national, regional and local organisations are working together to identify solutions to sustain rural communities and prevent further de-population which could arise if more families had to move away from these areas due to a lack of childcare and parents' needing to work.

As small business owners, childminders may be able to operate in areas where larger childcare settings may not be financially viable, and they can care for both pre-school and school-age children. This has led to some regional/rural organisations proposing that the legislation and regulations should be changed to enable childminding to be delivered on non-domestic premises such as village halls, community centres or other larger community premises - and potentially support larger numbers of children. SCMA has been contributing to these discussions to ensure that these are informed, that any consideration of this does not undermine the unique nature of childminding or adversely affect existing childminding businesses (now or in the future), and also to consider if another category of new rural childcare practitioner (or similar) may be required.

### 2. Review of Care Definitions

In June 2024 the Scottish Government started a review of all care definitions in the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 including the different childcare provider types to ensure they are still fit for purpose and meet today's needs. The current legal definition of childminding is –

*"Looking after one or more child for more than two hours a day on domestic premises for reward (where the childminder is not a relative, a foster parent, a kinship carer or someone with parental responsibilities and where the child is not looked after in a parents' home)".*

Many childminders have for some time felt that the term "looking after" is outdated, does not reflect the fact that childminding is a high-quality form of registered childcare and has contributed to misperceptions that childminding is a lesser form of childcare to nursery and more akin to "babysitting" or "looking after". In parallel, the "on domestic premises" distinction means that childminding can only legally be delivered from a home, recognises the unique home-based nature of childminding and is also important from a financial perspective, as the inclusion of "on domestic premises" has meant that childminders are exempt from paying business rates. Nurseries have been able to obtain 100% relief on business rates since 2018, for parity, through the Nursery Rates Relief Scheme, and childminding is not included within that scheme.

SCMA has been participating in this review as a member of both the over-arching Steering Group for the linked reviews of Care Definitions and the Health and Social Care Standards and a member of the Short Life Working Group on Care Definitions to represent the interests of childminding.

### 3. New Category of Childminder in England

Previously, childminders in England had to register their service from domestic premises, spend at least 50% of their time delivering their service from their home, but could deliver part of their service from non-domestic premises. In November 2024 the UK Government introduced further changes to increase flexibility for childminders. This included reducing the 50% limit at the registered home and introducing a new additional category of childminder called 'Childminder Without Domestic Premises'. This new category will enable individuals to register as a childminder and deliver their service entirely from non-domestic premises if this is their preference, and to work with up to three other childminders or assistants. The Scottish Government is aware of this development in England and has asked for SCMA's position on this.

### 4. Additional Factors

- **COVID-19:** SCMA is aware from feedback to previous surveys that some members who chose to give up childminding during or shortly after the pandemic reported that they had done so as they had felt that as their childminding setting was also their family home, they were putting their own family members (who had health issues) at greater risk by bringing children into their setting. Others reported that the intensity of the pandemic had changed their perspective, and they would prefer more separation between their work and their home.
- **Potential New Childminders:** The Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos/MORI to undertake research on Childminding Workforce Trends which was published in 2022<sup>1</sup>. This included interviews with some people who had considered becoming a childminder but then chose not to do so – and some were put off by the requirement to provide their service from their home and would have preferred the option of doing so from another facility.
- **Ratios:** Linked to all of the above it has also been questioned if the current adult-to-child ratios within childminding remain appropriate or require modification.

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<sup>1</sup> Childminding Workforce Trends: qualitative research report, Ipsos/MORI (on behalf of Scottish Government), April 2022



## Methodology

SCMA conducted an online survey of members from 11 February – 7 March 2025. A range of supporting measures were used to promote the survey and encourage responses including sending reminder e-mail alerts, a text message and promoting on social media.

Responses were received from 857 members (childminding businesses) in all 32 local authority areas (providing a 35% response level and representing 29% of the full childminding workforce in Scotland).

By conducting the survey, SCMA sought to obtain opinion to inform its participation in all of the workstreams noted in the previous section of this report. It was also an opportunity to test, on a larger scale, the anecdotal feedback we had already received from some members on this subject.





## Survey Results

Online survey conducted 11 February - 7 March 2025.

### **About You**

- 857 responses from members (childminding businesses) in all 32 local authority areas (35% response level and representing 29% of the full childminding workforce in Scotland)
- age range (n=856 responses):
  - 20-29 (1% / n=12)
  - 30-39 (12% / n=99)
  - 40-49 (28% / n=237)
  - 50-59 (38% / n=326)
  - 60-69 (20% / n=175)
  - 70+ (1% / n= 7)
- length of time childminding (n=855):
  - <5 yrs (15% / n=129)
  - 5-10 yrs (16% / n=141)
  - 10-15 yrs (19% / n=164)
  - 15-20 yrs (16% / n=136)
  - 20-25 yrs (16% / n=135)
  - 25-30 yrs (11% / n=90)
  - 30+ yrs (7% / n=60)

Funded provider (ELC) (46% / n=386) and non-funded provider (54% / n=461)

- 585 free-text comments were also received.

### **Childminding on Non-Domestic Premises**

**Do you believe that there should be an option to deliver Childminding on Non-Domestic Premises?** (n=838)

- Yes (53% / n=446)
- No (24% / n=203)
- Don't know (23% / n=189)

**If you answered 'Yes' to the first question** (n=390) -

**Do you believe this should be based on:**

- Delivering a service wholly/only from non-domestic premises (20% / n=80)
- Providing a mix of from home and from non-domestic premises (71% / n=275)
- Don't know (9% / n=35)

**Please indicate why you believe there should be an option for childminding to be delivered from non-domestic premises (please tick all that apply)**

(n=390):

- It could provide greater flexibility (76% / n=297)
- Current setting size and ratios are limiting (54% / n=212)
- Increased space / potential for larger service (69% / n=268)
- Potential to strengthen my business sustainability (40% / n=157)
- Opportunity to work with other childminders / reduce loneliness (81% / n=317)
- May be particularly suitable for after-school care (63% / n=246)
- I would prefer this to delivering from home (18% / n=71)
- Other (please specify) (14% / n=53)

53 free-text comments were submitted in response to 'Other (please specify)'. Main themes included –

- expanding on the increased flexibility which this could provide to childminders in delivering their service, creating more space for some activities (i.e. play) if childminder's home is small and weather poor, and benefits of working informally together with other childminders without the legal requirement to register as delivering childminding as a partnership;
- could enable childminders still living at home to be able to deliver a service for families without dominating their parents' home;
- could provide additional flexible options for delivering a childminding service if partner or other family member now working from home since the pandemic, or when childminder's own children studying for exams and quiet periods required at home;
- interest in making use of garden buildings;
- could provide an option for those interested in delivering a childminding service, but currently prevented from doing so (eg. tenant not receiving permission from landlord)

**What impact do you believe being able to deliver from non-domestic premises may have on your business sustainability? (n=385)**

- Significant increase (19% / n=75)
- Increase (35% / n=133)
- No change / don't know (44% / n=171)
- Decrease (1% / n=5)
- Significant decrease (0%)

**Please use this space to make any comments about why you believe childminding on non-domestic premises should become an option:**

157 comments were submitted in response to this question. Main themes included:

- Provide a very positive opportunity for childminders to work together part of the time, share experience and areas of specialisation/special interest, support skills and knowledge transfer, and support newer childminders;
- Childminding setting size can be limited by house size, existing ratios, the number of Assistants who could be employed and by planning requirements;

part delivery on non-domestic premises could provide a flexible solution to respond to higher demand for services at different times;

- Create real opportunities for delivery and expansion of after-school childcare, for which demand is high in many parts of the country but places limited by size of childminding settings;
- Delivery of part of a childminding service on non-domestic premises would provide a natural evolution for childminding at a time when homeworking has become more normalised for many family members, post-pandemic, who also need space and quiet;
- A number of those submitting additional comments also recognised this could be particularly useful in remote and island areas and agreed that the option should be available to all childminders but stated that they wouldn't personally be interested in doing this.

**If you answered 'No' to the first question** (n=197) –

**Please indicate why you believe there should not be an option for childminding to be delivered from non-domestic premises (please tick all that apply) –**

- Childminding is based on and delivered from the home, replicates the family environment and could not be delivered effectively in other locations (94% / n=186))
- It would dilute the unique selling point of the nurturing, home-based, small-group nature of childminding (81% / n=159)
- Childminding involves a high element of outdoors activity (in gardens and further afield) which could be lost if delivered on non-domestic premises (58% / n=114)
- Difficult to maintain the registration requirements of the setting if delivered in a shared/multi-use community facility (46% / n=90)
- It could involve significant additional cost to hire external facilities (52% / n=102)
- It could involve additional insurance complexity or cost (55% / n=108)
- Difficult to maintain the service if delivered with other childminders and one or more no longer wants to (48% / n=95)
- I am the only childminder / not enough childminders in my area to make this viable (8% / n=16)
- Other (please specify) (17% / n=33)

33 free-text comments were received in response to this question. Main themes included –

- Reiterating that childminding is very nurturing and replicates a home environment for children whose parents choose this for them; this would be diluted or destroyed by delivering on non-domestic premises;
- Such a change would not be childminding and more like a nursery or play group;
- Insurance complexity and costs could be significant



**If childminding was permitted to be delivered from non-domestic premises by others in your area, what impact do you believe this would have on your business and its sustainability? (n=197)**

- Significant positive effect (2% / n=3)
- Positive effect (1% / n=1)
- No change / don't know (45% / n=89)
- Negative effect (31% / n=60)
- Significant negative effect (22% / n=44)

**Please use this space to make any other comments about why you believe childminding on non-domestic premises should not become an option.**

89 free-text comments were received. Main themes included:

- delivery on non-domestic premises would undermine the fact that childminding is a unique, very nurturing form of childcare and family support, delivered in a home setting and in small groups, for parents who wish this for their child(ren) - some of whom may not cope in larger settings;
- delivery on non-domestic premises should not be classed as childminding and would be more similar to nursery, after school clubs or play groups;
- delivery on non-domestic premises would make it more difficult to maintain safety and quality in a shared setting, with additional regulatory compliance issues and costs which have already resulted in a number of play groups and after school clubs closing.

**Do you believe it would be possible to replicate and maintain the nurturing home-based nature of childminding, including the high element of outdoors play and activity, if delivered on non-domestic premises? (n=719)**

- Yes (fully) (28% / n=203)
- Yes (partially) (29% / n=206)
- No (34% / n=243)
- Don't know (9% / n=67)

**How interested would you personally be in delivering from non-domestic premises? (n=718)**

- Very interested (13% / n=96)
- Interested (15% / n=109)
- Not sure / need to know more about how this would work (29% / n=208)
- Not interested (42% / n=305)

**Looking ahead, what impact do you believe the delivery of childminding from non-domestic premises could have on your future career intentions and how long you may continue childminding? (n=711)**

- I believe I may continue childminding longer (30% / n=212)
- No impact/change (47% / n=336)
- I believe I would give up/leave childminding earlier (23% / n=163)

## **Definition of Childminding**

**Do you believe that the term “looking after” within the existing legal definition of childminding is outdated and should be changed to reflect that childminding is a registered form of childcare? (n=673)**

- Yes (81% / n=542)
- No (8% / n=56)
- Don't know (11% / n=75)

**Do you believe that “on domestic premises” should remain within the existing legal definition of childminding (to maintain the unique nature of childminding and linked to non-payment of business rates)? (n=674)**

- Yes (65% / n=438)
- No (9% / n=61)
- Don't know (26% / n=175)

**If it is decided to permit childminding on non-domestic premises, would you prefer that (n=673):**

- The existing legal definition and category of childminding should be changed and widened to include delivery on either domestic or non-domestic premises (27% n=179)
- A separate new, additional legal category of Childminding on Non-Domestic Premises should be created to support this (similar to in England) (52% / n=349)
- Don't know / no opinion (21% / n=145)

**Given the challenges experienced in remote, rural and island areas (as summarised in the introduction to this survey) would you prefer (n=670)**

- Childminding is changed to also permit delivery on non-domestic settings to help with this (33% / n=222)
- Another new (non-childminding) category of rural childcare practitioner is developed to help with this (38% / n=252)
- Don't know / no opinion (29% / n=196)

**If a new category of rural childcare practitioner (or similar) was to be developed, how important do you believe it is to undertake impact assessments to consider local childminding provision within these areas prior to establishing alternate new forms of provision, so as to avoid adversely affecting local childminding business sustainability? (n=670)**

- Not important (3% / n=18)
- No opinion (26% / n=177)
- Important (38% / n=257)
- Very Important (33% / n=218)

## **Childminding Ratios**

**The current standard childminding ratio is to care for no more than one child under 12 months, no more than three children under school-age and no more than six children under twelve (including the childminder's own) at any one time. Considering these ratios, please indicate which of the following statements you agree with (please tick all that apply) (n=642):**

- the ratios are appropriate and do not require to change (28% / n=182)
- the ratios are limiting and would benefit from being changed (51% / n=329)
- the ratios do not support business sustainability (31% / n=197)
- I believe that my own children should be included in the ratios (13% / n=84)
- I do not believe that my own children should be included in the ratios (30% / n=192)
- If not having any school-age children in my setting at the time, the number of pre-school children that I can care for at any one time could be higher than at present (47% / n=303)
- Greater individual flexibility within agreed ratios and maximum registration numbers could reduce the need for variations (55% / n=352)
- Other (please specify) (18% / n=114)

114 free-text comments were received. The main themes included:

- Much agreement that a childminder's own children should be included in their ratios, but strong views that this should only be until they reach High School age and then removed from ratios to support business sustainability; also, inappropriate and unfair that a childminder's child(ren) have to be included in their ratios all of the time if a split family, their spouse/partner is living separately and their child(ren) are not in the setting every day;
- Strong support for increasing the maximum number of pre-school children who can be cared for at any one time from three to four, and also enabling childminders to care for twin babies without requirement for a variation;
- Strong support for providing childminders with increased flexibility on managing numbers within maximum registered numbers without requirement for a variation;
- A more individualised approach towards childminders could be used when deciding if a variation is needed, particularly for higher ratios, based on the childminder's experience and inspection grades;
- Use of "pre-school" and "school-age" terminology within ratios has become imprecise due to the deferral year and children who may previously have been deemed to be of school-age now being consider pre-school and distorting ratios;
- While not a ratios matter, some comments from those in rural and island communities that childminders should be able to deliver funded ELC to relatives (i.e. grandchildren), as they may be the only funded provider in their area.



**Linked to the above, childminders are required to submit requests to the Care Inspectorate for a variation to their registration if they wish to temporarily increase their registered numbers and adjust their ratios to accommodate the needs of a family (which may be an emergency for the family). If you have submitted a variation(s) to the Care Inspectorate for this purpose, please indicate what your experience has been:**

	<b>Time experienced in having variation approved (n=466)</b>	<b>Level of information required (n=460)</b>	<b>Overall experience (n=459)</b>
<b>Very positive</b>	12% (n=54)	9% (n=41)	10% (n=48)
<b>Positive</b>	26% (n=122)	28% (n=131)	29% (n=133)
<b>No opinion</b>	36% (n=168)	39% (n=179)	35% (n=162)
<b>Negative</b>	20% (n=92)	19% (n=86)	19% (n=86)
<b>Very negative</b>	6% (n=30)	5% (n=23)	7% (n=30)

**Please use this space to make any other comments about childminding on non-domestic premises, the definition of childminding and childminding ratios.**

139 free-text comments were received. Main themes included –

- Mixed views about if childminding on non-domestic premises would work – seen as providing much-needed flexibility by some, while seen as diluting childminding by others with concerns that if delivery on non-domestic premises became more akin to playgroup or school-age childcare provision (for short two-hour sessions) this could further reduce the sustainability of childminding;
- Strong views that the existing definition of childminding should be changed to reflect that childminding is a professional form of registered childcare – not just looking after – and that it should retain the “on domestic premises” distinction; if childminding is to be permitted to be delivered on domestic premises this should be via a separate new category of childminder enabling delivery on both domestic and non-domestic premises;
- Strong views that childminders should be able to care for up to four pre-school children, not have their own children included in their ratios if of High School age and be given more flexibility to manage their ratios within maximum numbers without requirement for variations – recognising that families need flexible childcare, their requirements can change quickly and childminders need to be able to respond. All suggestions were linked to supporting families and childminders’ business sustainability and there is a desire for Care Inspectorate to pilot these measures.

## Analysis of Variation Within Responses

The survey findings were further sub-analysed to determine if there were any significant variations in responses by members practising and living in different local authority areas (including comparing members' responses from rural and island areas with urban areas) and also by the length of time childminding (comparing more recently registered childminders with longer established childminders).

### Rural and Islands

Of the 857 responses received, 300-305 were from childminder members who are living and practising in remote, rural and islands local authority areas, depending on the rural classification scale used to measure these responses.<sup>2</sup> In addition, 375 responses were received from childminders living and practising in local authorities classed as 'Urban with Substantial Rural Areas'. However, for the purposes of this analysis it was not possible to determine the number of responses from the substantial rural communities within urban areas.

While interest has been shown by some organisations working at a policy level in the possibility of delivering childminding on non-domestic premises to respond to the acute shortage of childcare in some rural and island areas, more detailed analysis of the survey responses by local authority area did not identify a clear rural vs urban differential on this subject. The views of childminders practising in rural and island areas are more mixed about this potential.

On the subject of whether they believe there should be an option to deliver childminding on non-domestic premises, for which there was 53% support overall nationally, those responding above this were Moray (56%), Highland (59%), Orkney (64%), Angus (65%), Dumfries and Galloway (71%) and Shetland (100%) although it should be qualified that this last response was based on a single respondent. Those below the national level were Perth and Kinross (23%), Stirling (38%), Aberdeenshire (42%), Scottish Borders (43%), Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (50%) and Argyll and Bute (also 50% in support, but with almost as many (44%) against the option in contrast to other areas where those not supporting the option were more evenly split between not supporting and not knowing/being undecided). In parallel, some urban or urban with substantial rural areas were above the national level including Fife (58%), Aberdeen (61%), Dundee (63%), Renfrewshire (64%) and Inverclyde (83%) adding to the mixed picture.

On the possible link between delivering childminding on non-domestic premises and business sustainability, 54% of those nationally who responded 'yes' to support the option of non-domestic premises believed this would have a 'Significant Increase' or an 'Increase' on their business sustainability. Most remote and island authorities were around or above the national level of 54%. Responses from urban areas and urban with substantial rural areas were more mixed, but with a number on or above the national level.

We have reported earlier within this publication that while 53% of member childminding businesses supported the option of delivering childminding on non-domestic premises, only 28% of respondents would be personally interested in doing so. Responses from remote and island areas were broadly consistent with this, with equal numbers above and below the national figure and ranging from 9% interest in Orkney and 13% in Aberdeenshire to 42% in Dumfries and Galloway and 60% in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

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<sup>2</sup> If using the Scottish Executive Urban Rural Classification scale (Randall) of 14 local authorities 300 responses were received or if using the Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services (RESAS) classification of 15 local authorities 305 responses were received.

## Length of Time Childminding

We also believed it important to identify if there were any pronounced differentials in responses between more recently registered childminders and longer established childminding businesses. As reported earlier (on page 9) there was a good and even spread of responses across the lengths of time childminding.

Looking firstly at those who support the option for delivering childminding on non-domestic premises (53% nationally), there was quite a pronounced difference between those more recently registered compared to longer-established childminders – 69% of those within their first five years and 63% of those within 5-10 years of operating support the option, whereas those who may be viewed more as mid-career were a little below the national level (10-15 years (51%), 15-20 years (46%) and 20-25% (52%)); and those later-career were less supportive (25-30 years (41%) and 30 years+ (42%)).

Looking next at potential influencing factors behind these responses:

- Business Sustainability

54% of those who supported the option to deliver on non-domestic premises nationally believed this could have a 'Significant Increase' or 'Increase' on their business sustainability. Interestingly, while earlier-stage childminders were broadly consistent with the national level (<5 years (55%) and 5-10 years (55%)), more established mid-career childminders had the strongest opinions regarding the potential positive impact on business sustainability (10-15 years (63%) and 15-20 years (70%)), with later career stage childminders believing this would have less of an effect.

- Ability to replicate and maintain the nurturing home-based nature of childminding, including high elements of outdoors play and activity, if delivered on non-domestic premises

Further variation in responses was recorded here where those more recently registered believed this could be done and responded 'Yes (fully)' (<5 years (39%) and 5-10 years (36%)) in comparison to more experienced, longer-established childminders who were much less confident this could be achieved with only 21% of those practising for 20-25 years, 18% of 25-30 years and 19% of 30 years+ believing this would be possible. Opinions were more consistent between career stages when responding 'Yes (partially)', and only 18% of newer childminders (<5 years) believed it would not be possible to replicate and maintain childminding on non-domestic premises and answered 'No' in comparison to 30%+ across all other career stages (reaching 37% in 10-15 years, 15-20 years and 30 years+ and 46% in those practising for 25-30 years).

Finally, in terms of personal interest in delivering childminding on non-domestic premises, 28% of all respondents to the survey reported that they would be personally interested in doing so. Personal interest is clearly much higher in earlier career stages (<5 years (46%) and 5-10 years post-registration (34%)) and decreases through the career stages (10-15 years (32%), 15-20 years (28%), 20-25 years (16%) and 25-30 years (14%)), with 17% of 30 years+ also expressing interest.



## Commentary and Recommendations

SCMA believed it very important to conduct this survey, as while the potential for childminding to be delivered on non-domestic premises has been arising in an increasing range of policy discussions in Scotland, little was known about how childminders would feel about it. If any changes to the delivery of childminding are to be considered, it is imperative that childminders' views are at the heart of these discussions and are used to inform any future developments.

SCMA has also been leading on much positive work which is underway around Scotland to address the acute decline in the childminding workforce, and we are starting to see small signs of recovery. For the second successive year there has been a reduction in cancelled registrations (childminders leaving the workforce) and an increase in new registrations (new childminders coming into the workforce) attributable to our efforts. This has provided a platform for recovery which is now being driven at pace and scale through the Programme for Scotland's Childminding Future – a three-year national programme on childminder retention and recruitment predominantly funded by the Scottish Government, delivered by SCMA and which will see 27 out of 32 local authorities in Scotland partnering with us during 2025-2026.

However, wider work is also required to support this and it is appropriate to consider if childminding needs to or should evolve, as a high-quality form of registered childcare and family support, **but in a way which would not undermine or risk damaging the work underway and the unique, nurturing nature of childminding delivered in a home setting in small groups, with low adult to child ratios and high elements of outdoor play and learning.** This is also very important to families who make an informed choice to use childminders, because they know that they provide and replicate a nurturing home environment which can be particularly beneficial for children who may not settle or cope with a larger childcare setting. Interest in all-age childcare has increased, along with recognition that childminding already does this and provides care and learning for children from 0-12/16 years and spanning both pre-school and school-age childcare. It is also important to understand that all forms of childcare are not the same and that childminding shouldn't be viewed as a generic form of childcare which could be delivered anywhere.

Our survey findings provide a strong and substantive sample of the views of 857 members (childminding businesses) in Scotland (35% response level, representing 29% of the full childminding workforce) from all 32 local authority areas.

From this survey it is clear that:

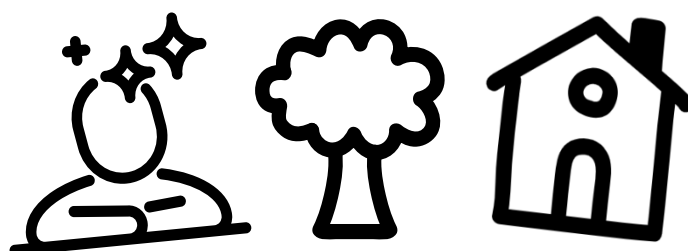
- just over half of respondents (53%) believe childminders in Scotland should have the option to deliver their service on non-domestic premises;
- a clear majority (71%) believe that if this option were to be available it should be based on childminders being able to deliver their service as a mix of from home and also from non-domestic premises;
- a majority (65%) believe that the existing definition of 'childminder' should retain its distinction of delivery on domestic premises, and over half of respondents (52%) believe that a separate, new additional category of childminder should be developed to support delivery from both domestic and non-domestic premises if this were to be progressed;
- while many respondents supported the principle of childminders having the option to deliver part of their service from non-domestic premises to support their preferences

and business sustainability, the number of childminders who would personally be interested in taking up this option is lower (28%); and

- only just over 1 in 4 childminders (28%) believed it would be possible to fully replicate and maintain the nurturing home-based nature of childminding, including the high element of outdoors play and activity, if delivered on non-domestic premises.

Other important findings included:

- 81% of respondents believe that the existing definition of a childminder should be updated to remove the outdated reference to “looking after” and to reflect that childminding is a form of registered childcare;
- there was a little more support for creating a new category of ‘Rural Childcare Practitioner’, or similar (38%), as opposed to providing childminders with the option of delivering on non-domestic premises (33%), to reduce childcare shortages in remote and island areas. However, 71% of all respondents believe that local impact assessments must be undertaken prior to establishing alternate new forms of provision, so as to avoid adversely affecting local childminding business sustainability. In this regard it is important to apply learning from the expansion of funded ELC in which few local authorities undertook impact assessments of their own expansion plans on childminders to the detriment of the childminding workforce and that we do not repeat this<sup>3</sup>; and while we didn’t ask a specific question on this in the survey, some respondents from rural and island areas raised again the issue of childminders who are delivering funded ELC not being permitted to deliver funded hours to relatives. No matter where the childminder or other practitioner is based (working from home or a village hall), they may be the only provider in the area, and this will continue to provide a barrier to uptake of the statutory entitlement of funded ELC in rural and islands areas if not addressed;
- childminders should be provided with greater flexibility within their existing adult-to-child ratios to manage demand for pre-school and school-age childcare within their setting without requirement to apply to the Care Inspectorate for temporary variations to their registration (i.e. to have four, rather than three, pre-school children in their setting when no school-age children are present). There was also strong support for removing childminders’ own children from being included within their maximum registered numbers once they reach high school.



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<sup>3</sup> Childminding Evidence Paper, SCMA, August 2022

## Next Steps

SCMA has reviewed these findings including the 585 additional comments submitted by members. These provided further detail and insight beyond the questions asked and reported on here.

We have come to rely on our members for their considered, balanced, informed and insightful feedback based upon their practical experience of delivering childminding. It is also clear from the results that many members recognise that there could be positive potential for childminding to evolve to include mixed delivery models, to respond to demand for school-age childcare; and particularly after the pandemic as a result of which childminders may find their spouses or other family members now working from home part of the time and also requiring space and time to work. But if childminding is to evolve, it needs to be done with care and thought to avoid any further unintended consequences – particularly as through being based in the home childminders are not required to pay business rates – which could make their businesses unsustainable if this were to change.

While the results do not provide a resounding “yes”, the numbers in support of childminders in Scotland having the option to deliver their service on non-domestic premises were twice that of those who did not agree.

**As such, we believe this provides a mandate for SCMA to engage in further discussion with the Scottish Government, Care Inspectorate and others and to use the above main points and supporting evidence captured by this survey as a basis for discussion. In doing so, SCMA will ensure that the views of all members – for, against or undecided – about childminding on non-domestic premises are represented and we will continue to support members at all career stages and with all business models.**

However, we recognise that the consideration of delivering childminding on non-domestic premises at a policy level remains theoretical or academic at this time, as the definition of childminding is contained within legislation (Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010) and only legally permits childminding to be delivered on domestic premises, with Care Inspectorate regulations built upon this legal foundation.

While it could be possible to change the legislation, such as through the ongoing Review of Care Definitions, we are also very aware that delivering part of a childminding service on non-domestic premises could involve additional cost to hire the facilities and significant complexity (including regulatory and insurance requirements) if delivered from a shared multi-use space (i.e. village hall or community centre) over which childminders would have less control and which may have additional regulatory compliance requirements due to their size and the increased number of children and adults who could be using them. Even in cases where a small village hall may only be used to deliver a childminding service, additional issues could arise around who is responsible for the maintenance of the building, and it would not be feasible for a childminder to take this on. Such regulatory requirements have increasingly been cited by school-age childcare providers and pre-school play groups in Scotland as the reason for their closure. A separate feasibility study of school-age childcare quality assurance has been undertaken by the Scottish Government and Care Inspectorate linked to this.

In parallel, it will be vital to retain childminders’ exemption from paying business rates to support their business sustainability. The retention of delivery on domestic premises within the legal definition of childminding would support this. While nurseries have also had exemption since 2018 through the Nursery Rates Relief Scheme, for parity, we do not

believe that schemes of this nature have the same guarantee or permanency as being defined in legislation.

If childminding on non-domestic premises was to be permitted, thought would also be required as to how childminders delivering part of their service on non-domestic premises would also be exempt from paying business rates for this part of their service and in line with other providers – also to support their business sustainability. One option could be determining that a new, additional category of childminder permitting delivery on both domestic and non-domestic premises could have a requirement that more than 50% of the childminding service should be delivered on domestic premises to support this.

**Given the potential complexities (regulatory and other) which could arise in delivering childminding on shared-use non-domestic premises, we believe that for this to be considered further, a similar feasibility study needs to be conducted by the Care Inspectorate and Scottish Government to understand if this would be feasible, what this would involve and if this would, in turn, prove financially viable and sustainable for childminders.**

**Recognising our own role in establishing the evidence on and developing childminding, SCMA would be willing to explore part-funding or funding this study (depending on its extent).**

Graeme McAlister  
Chief Executive

May 2025



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