



A manifesto for Childminders

May 2024



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A new opportunity

There is no greater role for government than providing the foundations for each and every child to benefit from the very best start in life. Properly resourced early education and childcare, that is accessible and secure, with a respected and valued workforce should sit at the heart of that.

To deliver the high-quality early education and childcare that all children deserve requires vision, long-term thinking, and determination - but the rewards are immeasurable. It is an investment for a brighter future for all, and growth for the country as a whole.

Because, just like healthcare or transport, early education and childcare is an essential part of our country's infrastructure. It is one of the essential services necessary for our communities to thrive, for our economy to function, and for our country to prosper going forward.

However, our current early education and childcare system is suffering from many years of neglect, the workforce is weary and the number of childminders in England and Wales are falling off a cliff.

PACEY is calling for the new government to act quickly to address the immediate priorities within the system, but then to be courageous in the creation of a long-term strategic vision.

PACEY's vision is for a future where childminders are no longer treated as glorified babysitters, with poor pay and conditions and little or no recognition for the amazing work that they do.

It is a future where becoming a childminder is an easily achievable ambition, with clear processes and support every step of the way.

It is a future where being a childminder is sustainable and rewarding and not a constant struggle for recognition and survival.

It is a future where childminders are embedded within a strong and properly resourced early education and childcare sector and are an intrinsic part of wider services children and families interact with, including children's centres and family hubs as well as children's social care and health services.

It is a future where every child and family that wants or needs the unique, flexible, and home-based care that a childminder provides can access it, regardless of their circumstances.

Helen Donohoe

Chief Executive, PACEY

Vice chair, The Early Education and Childcare Coalition.



Manifesto at a glance

There have been myriad attempts to tweak the system and working environment for childminders but none to date have managed to address the rapid departure of many from the sector and the decline in numbers joining the profession.

This manifesto outlines how the next government must act urgently to retain the skilled and experienced childminders that we already have, and put in place a joined up, long term strategy to recruit people in and keep them in childminding.

PACEY is calling for a series of measures to renew and restore our childminding sector:

- 1** A universal, national funded programme of childminder pre-registration support.
- 2** Accessible post registration support to enable professional growth of childminders and mechanisms to reduce isolation and provide emotional support.
- 3** Funding systems and payments that are fair and sustainable.
- 4** A clear, consistent approach reducing barriers and enabling childminders to deliver funded high-quality childcare and early education in Wales
- 5** Reform of the current rule that excludes non-parental relatives from providing funded childcare to related children in England.
- 6** An obligation on all local authorities to audit existing wraparound provision in their area and avoid undermining childminder provision.
- 7** Improvements to the Universal Credit system to allow for the unique working context of childminders.
- 8** A joined-up, national approach to define and clarify local planning, commercial waste and environmental health requirements for childminders to reduce the burden felt by childminders.
- 9** A long term strategy for early education and childcare that understands the unique value of childminders and puts them at the centre of addressing the unequal access that is currently leaving disadvantaged children, including those with SEND and ALN, missing out.

Introduction

The early education and childcare sector in England and Wales

The people who work in early education and childcare are crucial for the early emotional and cognitive development of children (childminders also care for older children¹). Many operate 52 weeks a year and as such are critical childcare provision for parents in employment. However, the sector has for too long been treated like a Cinderella service. There are parallels here with the social care sector: reliance on private fees to supplement poor public funding, a lack of strategic, political investment and a neglected workforce.

There are currently over 1.5 million Ofsted registered childcare places in England available for children from birth to age four. These are provided by around 56,000 registered early years providers in England with over 347,000 staff in school-based, private, and voluntary sector nurseries, pre-schools, and childminder settings. In Wales there are over 79,000 registered childcare and play places available for the wider under 12 years age range. These are provided by around 3400 registered providers.²

The importance of early education and childcare is reflected in public opinion. The report Pulse Check: Public Attitudes Towards Early Years Education and Childcare showed 42 per cent of UK voters believe childcare and early years education reform will be key in their decision on how to vote in the next General Election.³ Furthermore, a study by charity Pregnant then Screwed found that for voters with children under 3, this increases to 96 per cent.⁴



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childcare and early years
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General Election

Introduction

However,

The latest Coram Childcare Survey indicates that sufficiency⁵ 'in all areas' has decreased across all categories since last year; in many areas, sufficiency has fallen dramatically. The proportion of local authorities who are able to say they have enough childcare 'in all areas' is as low as 17 per cent for the two-year-old funded entitlement in England, and 14 per cent for children under two.

Furthermore, only 6 per cent of local authorities believe they have enough childcare for disabled children.⁶

In Wales data suggests that only 55 per cent of eligible parents access the Childcare Offer for Wales.⁷ Only 24 per cent of local authorities in Wales report sufficient childcare 'in all areas' for children accessing the 30-hour entitlement for three- and four-year-olds.⁸

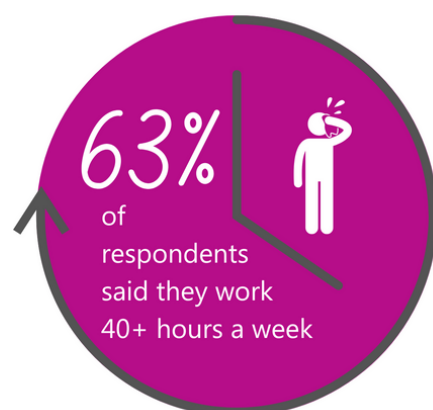
This is because the early education and childcare sector is in a precarious state of fragility. Many early years providers, particularly those in disadvantaged areas, are facing closure due to rising operational costs and insufficient funding rates for the government schemes they provide. Group settings are facing an alarming retention and recruitment crisis, and childminders are leaving the profession at a startling rate. Indeed, research by the Early Education and Childcare Coalition in England found that 57 per cent of nursery staff and 38 per cent of childminders are considering leaving the sector in the next 12 months.⁹

At PACEY we are contacted regularly by childminders who are at the end of their tether.

"I feel very rewarded with the families and children that I care for, and I love seeing how far children come along from when they start to when they leave...But I do feel let down that we are not treated the same as other early years settings and schools. I feel we are looked down on, looked as just a babysitting service, when we work as hard to help all the children in our care on their learning journey and giving them the best start in life that we can."

Childminder in Bracknell Forest, England

Our members work long hours with 63 per cent working over forty hours per week.¹⁰ They often also work with the children that have the greatest needs. A third of our members care for children who are formally recognised as having a disability or additional learning needs. However, at the current rate of decline, there will only be 1000 childminders left in England in 2035, from a high of almost 60,000.¹¹ In Wales the Independent Review of Childminding published in 2023 noted a similar concerning a decline of 23 per cent in the number of childminders in Wales between 2018 and 2022¹² with the decline continuing at pace since the publication of the report.



Introduction

Why does this matter?

Childminders, just like nurseries and pre-schools, are subject to rigorous Ofsted or Care Inspectorate Wales inspection, ensuring that they deliver high-quality education and care. Childminders, however, are unique. They offer a home-based and flexible service deep within communities and for many families and children, they are an extension of the family and home.

Childminder provision is particularly valuable to children with SEND or ALN needs and to families that need wider support. For children born during the pandemic they have provided a calm 'home from home' setting, that can help overcome attachment, emotional and communication difficulties. They also provide wraparound care for older children and their flexibility is particularly valued amongst parents who work shifts or unpredictable patterns. It will also be the setting of choice for many parents in England from September 2024 when the childcare expansion applies to nine-month-old babies.

If childminders were lost from the early education and childcare landscape, it would be a travesty.

The policy proposals outlined in this manifesto come directly from the experiences of our members who make up over 50 per cent of childminders in England and Wales.

Education and childcare is a devolved area of policy in Wales, with the Senedd having responsibility for decision making in these areas. This manifesto is intended for the UK general election and calls to government in line with this. The content reflects the differentiation, where needed, on key areas between England and Wales.



The way forward

Pre and post registration support

Becoming a childminder is a solo mission, involving setting up a business in your own home.

It usually takes around ten weeks for Ofsted in England to process a new childminder registration and around 12 weeks for CIW in Wales. However, we know that the journey to get there can be a perilous one and many give up in frustration. For example, there is the need for pre-registration training, a criminal record check for the childminder and anyone he or she lives with, the need for a health declaration report signed by a GP, HMRC registration, insurance requirements and all sorts of blockages as outlined below.

There is considerable variance in the level of assistance offered by local authorities, with most childminder coordinators now removed and their work either falling under wider generic childcare roles or having been removed completely because of budget constraints. We believe that many more potential childminders would start and complete the process of registration through to caring for children if there was one central point of support and a universal funded programme of childminder pre-registration support.

Prospective childminders are often juggling other responsibilities, including an existing job, while they try to set up and so need to know that they can go to someone to guide them through the process, to reassure them of their rights and to advise on setting up, marketing, finding families and running a business.

Once established and supported to find families, we know that childminders need on-going support. After financial viability, the biggest drivers behind childminders leaving are loneliness and a lack of recognition and respect. Childminding, largely working alone with small children can be lonely and exhausting.

"I am feeling quite tired and drained by some parents, who need a lot of reassurance, and by the children who are less resilient, and increasingly anxious"

Childminder in Gloucestershire, England.



81%

of
respondents
said they work
alone

With austerity came the dismantling of the local authority support and networks that many childminders enjoyed. Time and again we hear from members how much they value talking and meeting with other people and to that end our series of regional meet ups for childminders have been a huge success.

However, although PACEY exists as a member organisation to give as much help and guidance as we can but, in relying solely on member income from cash strapped childminders, we lack the capacity to meet the huge demand.

The way forward

PACEY is calling for:

- A universal, national funded programme of childminder pre-registration support to guide and advise across all aspects of establishing a childminding business.
- Accessible post registration support to enable professional growth of childminders and mechanisms to reduce isolation and provide emotional support.

Fair and timely payments

In a PACEY survey of 433 childcare professionals, 33.5 per cent said that they are intending to leave their role in childcare primarily due to the expansion of the funded scheme. PACEY poll, September 2023.



"I used to love my job, but this funding is making me realise it's time to quit. The stress is ridiculous."

Childminder in Norfolk, England

"The more funded children we take the worse our margins are. I would like to reward staff for their hard work and dedication, and this is just not possible in the current financial funding position."

Childminder in Sheffield, England

For many years the government funding for early education and childcare has failed to meet the cost of delivering funded entitlement places, leaving childminders struggling to survive.

This situation has been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis; rising inflation, energy costs and the costs of essential like food and travel. According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies early education and childcare providers have experienced a 13 per cent real-term cut in funding for three- and four-year-olds since 2017-18. ¹³



The way forward

Further, once the new childcare entitlements are fully rolled out, the Institute of Fiscal Studies estimates that around 80 per cent of pre-school childcare hours in England will be funded by the free entitlement. This makes it even more critical that the funding rate is right. If it is inadequate, there is a chance that providers will opt out of offering the new entitlements, reduce the quality of their provision, or close.

Childminders are predominantly sole traders, with very small margins for turnover, and so are particularly vulnerable to inadequate funding rates. They are also extremely vulnerable to the impact of poor payments practice.

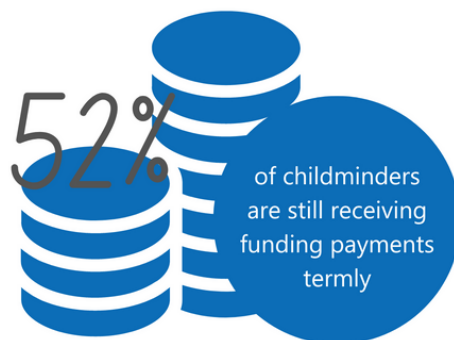
"I am in need of some advice. I am a childminder. Currently funding is paid twice a term, an initial payment and final payment. Going forward with nearly all children being entitled to this its really not sustainable financially, especially having received our new payment dates which fall after the October half term and after Christmas. Having spoken to other childminders we all feel exactly the same. We have spoken to our LA and there seems no plan to move forward to monthly payments and they have little interest in how it is affecting providers. Where do we stand as far as this is concerned? Is it something we have just got accept or find a new job?"

Samantha, Childminder who contacted PACEY.

We regularly hear about examples of poor practice and poor communication from local authorities. For example, too many local authorities pay their childminders termly. In our recent membership survey, we found that this was the case for 52 per cent of respondents.¹⁴ Childminders would like to see that changed to monthly, allowing them to manage their cash flow and protecting them against changing circumstances, for example losing and gaining different children in their setting.

'If [I'm] not paid monthly, I will have to close as I don't have funds to pay my mortgage for 3 months without any income'.

Childminder respondent to PACEY Big membership survey 2024."



PACEY is calling for:

- An emergency financial rescue package for early education and childcare providers
- An independent review of childcare funding, looking at the funding mechanisms as well as the rates, to ensure that funding is simplified and increased to a sustainable level across all age groups.
- Stronger directives to ensure that local authorities are following fair and timely procedures in regard to the entitlement funding for childminders.

The way forward

Funded childcare and early education in Wales

In Wales childminders PACEY Cymru are aware of the significant impact that the delivery and expansion of Flying Start is likely to have on the members that we support and specifically childminders.

PACEY Cymru knows from experience that there are barriers in place for many childcare providers (especially childminders) to be able to deliver Flying Start and Early Years education provision that need to be broken down or removed.

PACEY Cymru are aware of the challenges that procurement brings for childminders. We have evidence to prove that the current procurement rules are creating barriers for childminders in some areas of Wales. There is clearer guidance in place through the Flying Start Childcare guidance however this is still not interpreted and followed consistently at a local level. Improving this position would support access to quality care which supports the best interests of children, parental choice and sustainability of existing settings.

PACEY Cymru have called for a similar guidance document to be published in relation to setting out the position on the funding of early years education.

As a medium to longer term approach, we strongly believe that the approach within the Childcare Offer for Wales should be used and that any CIW registered settings should have the opportunity to be funded for Flying Start or Early Years Education without additional barriers around training, qualifications and procurement being put in place.

PACEY Cymru strongly believe that Welsh Government need to actively work swiftly to address the recommendations within the Independent Review of childminding which will support work to ensure that parents/carers have accessibility and choice in relation to quality childcare across Wales supporting them to return to work.

PACEY Cymru is calling for:

- A clear, consistent approach reducing barriers and enabling childminders to deliver funded high-quality childcare and early education.



The way forward

Related children

Further, the widening of the entitlement funding exacerbates the existing problem for childminders around related children. Currently, childminders in England are unable to claim entitlement funding for children related to them and there is overwhelming support amongst childminders for a change to this rule.

We estimate that just over a third of childminders currently have at least one child in their setting related to them, however they cannot access entitlement funding for those children. It is an area that Wales are far ahead on, with them including non-residing related children in funding entitlements from 2018. The definition of "childcare" in the Childcare Act 2006 excludes care provided for a child by parents or any other relatives. In England, the government has interpreted this to mean that childminders cannot deliver the early years and childcare entitlements to any children related to them by blood or marriage, whom they may already be looking after for payment. Other important forms of childcare support in England do permit parents to use related childminders. This includes Tax-Free Childcare, childcare vouchers, Working Tax Credit and Universal Credit, as long as they are Ofsted-registered and caring for the child outside the child's home. Furthermore, the ban on related children in England is unique to childminders; individuals working in or owning a nursery, school or pre-school are permitted to deliver the entitlement to related children.

72% of 705 respondents
said expanding the
funded scheme to related
children would
incentivise them to offer
more funded places.
PACEY poll, carried out in
October 23

72

Thousands of childminders in England are therefore losing on average £5,000 per year for each 30-hour place. This will only worsen with the further entitlement roll out.

Relatives of registered childminders, including nieces, nephews, and grandchildren, should not be forced to move to a new childcare setting in order to take up their childcare entitlement, greatly disrupting their continuity of care.

PACEY is calling for:

- **Reform of the current rule that excludes non-parental relatives from providing childcare to related children in England.**

The way forward

Wraparound provision

Wraparound childcare is provision directly before and after the school day, from 8am to 6pm during school term time for school age children. This provision can be offered by schools and private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) providers, including childminders. It should not require parents to pick their children up from school and drop them off at another location.


Of our members 72 per cent provide wraparound care and 58 per cent are worried or very worried about the new National Wraparound Childcare Programme in England undermining their income in this area because of the emphasis that is placed on school provision in the programme.¹⁵

PACEY is calling for:

- As part of the sufficiency duty¹⁶, all local authorities should be obliged to audit wraparound provision in their area and avoid undermining existing childminder provision.

The transition to universal credit

Over half of all childcare workers rely on in-work benefits. We have heard about many dreadful experiences that childminders are having with the transition to Universal Credit with increasing numbers of childminders leaving the profession because of its adverse impact.



Over half of all childcare workers rely on in-work benefits

"I am being sent daily 'job search' information (when I already have a 50+ hour a week childminding business) because I am 'not hitting MIF' but the reason I am not hitting MIF every month is because of the way in which the LA pay the funding in lump sums."

Folkestone Childminder via Facebook Forum.

In short, the one size fits all model for Universal Credit does not fit with the unique circumstances of childminding. For example, the minimum income floor (MIF) doesn't account for the income variances that childminders experience. Variable and often low incomes can be a result of the impact of looking after their own children, and/or the adult:child ratios/space requirements in the EYFS/NMS, or being paid termly at pre-determined fixed rates, only working in term time and/or caring for children with SEND/ALN whose needs can only be met by working at a reduced ratio.

"I was told last week that I should not accept disabled /SEN children in my setting because they need too much care and are not profitable so they should be in a specialist provision! They then referred to my Outstanding graded setting as 'a bit of babysitting'."

Anon childminder

The way forward

Many of our members tell us that they feel the rigid Universal Credit system just doesn't understand the nature of their work. We've heard of work coaches requesting meetings during the day when childminders have children in their care. Furthermore, although childminders run their business from their own home, they are extremely limited in what expenses they can claim under Universal Credit. For example, they can only claim £26 a month for wear and tear. This is not the same as allowed by the previous system whereby childminders claimed expenses based on HMRC criteria and it is adding yet another layer of financial unsustainability.

PACEY is calling for:

- Flexibility with the MIF to allow for variance in childminder income.
- Obligatory training for job coaches to enable better understanding of the role of childminders.
- A return of HMRC criteria for childminder expenses.

Local issues

There are ongoing issues at a local authority level for childminders that are growing and require national clarification from Government departments given the impact these are having on childminders in England and Wales and impacting on financial sustainability and viability.

These include:

Local planning requirements for childminders looking to operate from home-based settings. The requirements vary between local authorities and costs can be extremely high to even receive advice or a certificate of lawfulness.

Commercial waste charges for childminders. Again there is inconsistency in interpretation of guidance and definitions of where a childminder fits. This again is having a negative impact on childminders many of whom are facing new charges and being threatened with enforcement action.

Environmental Health systems. There is variation in how approaches are managed across local authorities with many of these causing undue burden on childminders and inconsistencies again around the interpretation of guidance and legislation



The way forward

PACEY is calling for:

- A joined-up, national approach to define and clarify local planning, commercial waste and environmental health requirements for childminders to reduce the burden felt by childminders.

Integration and inclusion

As part of a renewed, visionary early education and childcare infrastructure, childminders, if given the chance to thrive, can be core to ensuring each child has the start in life that they deserve, according to their needs and the needs of their parents and carers.

However, too often, the children who would benefit most from the unique home-based and smaller scale care that a childminder provides do not have access to such a setting. The data currently available is limited but we know the availability of childminders is vastly different across regions. For example, in England, the latest Ofsted data tells us that almost 40 per cent of all childminders are in London and the Southeast region and the most deprived areas of the country have proportionally fewer childminders compared with other areas of lower deprivation.¹⁷ It means that disadvantaged children, including those with SEND and ALN are continually missing out.

We therefore want to see a fully integrated, strategic approach to addressing the gaps in provision. It must be an approach that is based on evidence and data, and which has a resourced and supported childminder workforce at the centre.

Further, it should be delivered through local partnerships. No child lives in isolation and so the early education and care they receive should sit within the context of their wider life and that of their parents and carers. Previous work from PACEY, in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions, has shown how effective joined up working can be. Our Together for Twos project demonstrated excellent outcomes in both recruiting disadvantaged mums of two-year-olds into employment through childminding themselves, and through using childminders as a flexible source of care for their own children. The positive results came about because Coaches via Job Centre Plus held conversations with mothers about their choices and supported them on their pathway.



The way forward

That joined up working should be extended to other organisations with whom parents interact. For example, we know that there could be better coordination with primary care. We also know that if housing associations better understood the nuances of different childcare offerings, their residents would benefit from better outcomes, including employment for the parent. Likewise, childminder provision could be a valuable resource for local authorities across their statutory duties, including their most vulnerable children in need.

It is ambitious, but the benefits for children and their families, as well as wider communities and the economy are plentiful. However, it requires a real desire from the new government to drive towards a joined-up approach, with the proper resources and policies and practice that are driven by the needs of each child.

PACEY is calling for:

- A long term strategy for early education and childcare that understands the unique value of childminders and puts them at the centre of addressing the unequal access that is currently leaving disadvantaged children, including those with SEND and ALN, missing out.



About PACEY

PACEY is the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years. Formed in 1977, we are a charity dedicated to supporting everyone involved in childcare and early years to provide high quality services, information and advice to children, their families and carers. We want all children to experience high quality childcare and early education, helping them to have a bright future.

Across England and Wales we provide training, expert advice, help and peer support to practitioners and practical and impartial support and information for families and carers and those advising them. We represent the views and experiences of practitioners and champion their vital role in helping prepare children for a bright future.

With nearly 14,000 members we represent over half of all registered childminders in England and Wales. We are the voice for childminders, raising their profile, championing the work they do and fighting on their behalf to improve working conditions.

Our members are highly skilled, passionate and dedicated early years providers who play a vital role within our sector and to children's lives.

For press/media enquiries please contact kalai.brightley-hodges@pacey.org.uk



End notes

- 1 There is no uniform model for what childminders do. The structure of their business model varies considerably according to the types of service they offer (e.g. whole days, school wrap around, holidays) and the type and number of children they care for (e.g. funding entitled children as opposed to privately funded).
- 2 CIW. Chief Inspector's Annual Report 2022-23
- 3 Pulse Check: Public Attitudes Towards Early Education and Childcare 2023, page 10. EECC+Pulse+Check
- 4 Pregnant Then Screwed Manifesto 2023, page 2. Pregnant-Then-Screwed-Manifesto-2023.
- 5 The Childcare Act 2006 places a legal duty on local authorities to secure sufficient childcare (so far as is reasonably practicable) for their local population.
- 6 Coram Childcare Survey 2024. Childcare Survey 2024
- 7 Bevan Foundation. Tackling disadvantage through childcare in Wales. January 2024
- 8 Coram Childcare Survey 2024. Childcare Survey 2024
- 9 Early Education and Childcare Coalition. Retention and Return. 2023.
- 10 PACEY big membership survey. 2024
- 11 Written Evidence for Work and Pensions Select Committee, by Helen Donohoe for Helen Hayes MP April 2023.
committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/107132
- 12 Independent Review of Childminding in Wales. June 2023.
- 13 Institute of Fiscal Studies <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/what-you-need-know-about-new-childcare-entitlements>
- 14 PACEY Big membership survey 2024.
- 15 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wraparound-childcare-guidance-for-local-authorities>
- 16 The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to make sure that there are enough childcare places within its locality for working parents or for parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 to 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children).
- 17 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-providers-and-inspections-as-at-31-august-2022/main-findings-childcare-providers-and-inspections-as-at-31-august-2022#a-focus-on-childminders>