



Perceptions of the impact of childminding services on child, parent and family outcomes in Scotland



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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Executive summary

Background

Childminders are an important element of the childcare sector in Scotland and offer a unique experience of childcare for children and families. They provide care and learning in the childminder's own home, generally in small groups with no more than six children at one time. Often a childminder provides flexibility for parents or carers who need to manage work commitments, and may be used to provide wraparound care alongside nurseries or schools. Childminders are also consistently rated, through independent inspection by the Care Inspectorate, as providing high quality childcare across all quality criteria.

Childminders can play an important role in supporting the expansion of the entitlement to funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) to 1,140 hours a year for all three and four year olds, and eligible two year olds. If childminding services were to play a more prominent role in the ELC expansion, families could potentially have more choice about the type, location and hours of funded ELC they can access. Further, childminders will have an important role in future policy development, for example the extension of funded ELC to include younger children (for which provision will need to be different to that for three and four year olds) and the development of a new system of wraparound childcare.

Research aims and methods

There is a lack of evidence on provision by childminders and its impact on child, parent and carer, and family outcomes. This study aimed to develop the evidence base on the existing and potential impact of childminding services on child, parent and carer, and family outcomes, in the context of the ELC expansion. It has done this by assessing what aspects of childminding are believed to contribute to improving outcomes for children and their families in Scotland, according to childminders and parents using childminding services.

Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted by telephone with 26 childminders and 26 parents using childminders in March and April 2021.

Participants were self-selecting which may mean that the sample of parents is skewed towards those that are especially satisfied with their childminder (given we asked them to tell to us about the benefits of childminding). The sample of childminders may also be skewed towards childminders who are currently happy in their role and keen to talk about the benefits. While this does not negatively affect the quality of the information gathered because our aim was to explore perceptions of good quality childminding and the potential positive impact of childminding, it should be kept in mind the sample will not be representative of all parents using childminders or all childminders.

A further limitation of this research project is that it only included parents who were already using childminders. Exploring the perceptions of parents who are not using childminders, and may never have considered using a childminder, would be

valuable in identifying further ways to promote childminding and to test and develop promotional materials.

The views of childminders and parents are presented together, as there was little divergence between them. Where views are particularly from one group, this is highlighted in the text.

Perceptions of how childminding supports children

Parents and childminders agreed that the main features of childminding which supported children include:

- the **homely setting** where children feel comfortable and secure – which in turn supports their learning and development
- the **small numbers of children** in a childminding setting, which enables the childminder to provide more one-to-one, personalised care to each child and be more child-led and flexible, as well as providing a quieter and potentially less overwhelming environment than a nursery
- the **mix of ages of children**, which supports learning and development as younger and older children learn from each other
- the small numbers and **continuity of care** (children often stay with the same childminder for many years, from infancy to late primary school or beyond) lead to **very close relationships** between children and childminders, which was often perceived as providing children with more comfort, affection and nurturing than they might receive in a nursery
- the **professional approach, expertise and qualifications** of childminders, and the range of activities they provided – including participating in outdoor activities and in their local community – were valued by parents; they were also linked by participants to better learning and development outcomes than might typically be achieved through informal care e.g. from grandparents.

Perceptions of how childminding supports parents

Parents' primary concern was the wellbeing of their children, so the benefits for children listed above were seen by parents as the main benefits of childminding.

In addition, there are a number of features of childminding which were perceived to be beneficial for parents and families:

- **Flexibility** (in terms of the hours offered, whether that was early starts, late finishes, weekend care, or ad hoc and last minute arrangements) was seen as a key benefit by parents and often drives their decision to use a childminder. Childminders' ability to provide a flexible service gave parents peace of mind – there is room for last minute changes and if something comes up a childminder will usually be able to accommodate that.
- Parents also hugely valued the **frequent contact and communication** and chats at drop off/pick up time which built a **close yet professional relationship** with their childminder.

- The closeness and trust meant parents could open up about parenting problems and seek advice and support, and draw on their childminder's **professional knowledge and expertise**. The expertise and knowledge of childminders was seen as a major benefit to children and parents; at the same time, the professional aspect of the relationship meant parents were comfortable being clear about their childcare requirements. Both of these aspects were seen as key benefits, particularly when compared to informal care from family members. Participants also spoke of making use of their childminder's experience and knowledge to help them support their child through specific issues or stages.
- Parents also appreciated that childminders would often go '**above and beyond**' what might be expected to provide families with an extra level of both practical and emotional support, both when unexpected problems arose on a day (e.g. driving a child home if the parent could not make the pick up) or more longer-term support when families were going through difficulties (e.g. illness or separation). As such, childminding was viewed not just as a form of childcare, but also as a **form of family support**.

Other practical benefits for parents include:

- the fact that childminders are usually **very local** to them
- and that siblings can be cared for together.

Limitations of childminding

There was a general consensus among participants that there were no significant downsides to childminding for children attending the setting, and those who went on to discuss potential limitations typically only did so after being prompted.

The main drawback discussed was that smaller groups may limit children's social opportunities or the types of activities they can take part in. Other potential limitations discussed included:

- childminders having fewer resources than nurseries
- children being split up after leaving their childminder (for example, when they start school)
- and offering fewer trips if childminders have to provide care for children with different schedules, for example juggling a baby's nap routine and nursery/school pick up and drop off.

There was also a perception that a childminding setting does not provide the same internal quality checks than a nursery does as a result of employing more people, who can act as a check on each other's standards; with parents being reliant on one person for childcare.

Combining childminding with other forms of childcare

There are several reasons why parents chose to combine childminding with other forms of care; to cover all their work or study hours, to try to achieve value for

money, and because they want their child to attend a nursery setting as well before starting school. Although there are practical reasons for combining care, parents and childminders also saw benefits of children experiencing and being comfortable in different settings. Participants did, however, identify some logistical challenges to overcome.

There was no consensus among childminders on whether funded hours had had an impact on patterns of care. However, there was a view among some that it is not financially viable to provide care for children for a short time before or after nursery, as they count towards the setting's operating ratios. As a result, some childminders had stopped offering wraparound care or asked families to use them for full days only.

Perceptions of funded ELC

Some parents could not use their funded ELC entitlement with their childminder because their childminder did not deliver funded hours. Some participants did not have a problem with this whilst others would like to be able to use funded hours with their childminder.

Participants using their funded hours with a childminder were happy to be able to do so. They described benefits such as cost savings and being able to choose the childcare that best suited them and their child. Participants commented, however, that there is a lack of awareness and clarity amongst parents about funded ELC hours in relation to childminding.

There were mixed views amongst childminders about the impact of childminders providing funded hours on child outcomes. Some participants felt children would benefit from childminder requirements to meet the National Standard, whereas others felt they were already meeting the National Standard without being a partner provider.

Childminders currently delivering funded ELC described practical impacts on their service such as increased paperwork and training. Some commented that they are providing care for children they would not have otherwise because parents could not afford a childminder without funded hours. Childminders who are not delivering funded hours did not suggest they are struggling to fill places.

There were mixed views about the future impact of the full expansion to 1,140 hours on childminders, in terms of service provision and childminders' finances.

The impact of the pandemic

While COVID-19 has had huge ramifications for childminders and families across Scotland, participants felt that a degree of normality had returned. Childminders experienced a range of very difficult challenges from March 2020 onwards, particularly because of the impact of restrictions in the first lockdown on their income.

Childminders responded to these challenges by finding different ways to keep in touch with children and, once open again, by making more use of the outdoors and

adjusting activities to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus. They also thought of ways to support children through the disruption and stress they were experiencing. Parents said the pandemic made them even more grateful for their childminders. Some highlighted the major role their childminder played in supporting their family through very stressful times.

Overall, childminders' thoughts on their plans after the pandemic were mixed – ranging from being keen to reduce their hours, take a break or possibly retire, to those that are happy to be running their service again with no intention of cutting back their hours. Childminders did not feel that the pandemic had impacted their ability to provide ELC funded hours, nor did it effect their decisions around whether to deliver ELC.

Raising awareness of childminding

Participants agreed that there was a lack of awareness of childminding as an option and of what childminders can offer – and therefore a need for greater promotion of it. There was a feeling that national and local government have focused more on nursery provision.

There was a perception that parents who did not use childminders thought they were “like babysitters” or that the children are “just sitting watching TV”. A lack of knowledge about the training, qualifications and experience of many childminders, and the regulations they must adhere to, was thought to be at the root of these misconceptions.

The perceived benefits of childminding should be the starting point for promotion. From the point of view of parents, the main selling points are the flexible hours, the one-to-one attention and the nurturing, home-from-home setting. Childminders were keen to promote the developmental aspects (including their training and qualifications, the child development plans they produce and the records they keep) and the regulations, risk assessments and quality assurance mechanisms that apply to them as well as to nurseries.

Awareness of childminding should be raised, and misconceptions about it addressed by the Scottish Government (on television and through social media), by local authorities (on their websites) and by health visitors (when meeting parents).

When asked what might encourage a greater uptake of childminding, parents tended to suggest more funding (including extending funded hours to younger children) and greater clarity about what funding/financial assistance is already available (including information on tax free childcare, tax credits for childcare and universal credit for childcare).

The need for more childminders to address the difficulty of finding a childminding place was raised by parents.

1. Background and introduction

In March 2020, the Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos MORI Scotland to conduct qualitative research on perceptions of parents and childminders of the impact of childminding services on children and families using them. The research was paused in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but restarted in November 2020. This report details the findings of that research.

Childminding in Scotland

Childminders are an important element of the childcare sector in Scotland and offer a unique experience of childcare for children and families. They provide care and learning in the childminder's own home, generally in small groups with no more than six children at one time. In 2019, 4,752 childminders operated professional childminding services in Scotland, providing childcare for over 31,000 children. Childminders provide care for children of all ages; and in a single setting a childminder could be caring for infants, young children under five years of age, alongside older children of school age. Often a childminder can provide flexibility for parents or carers who need to manage work commitments, and may be used to provide wraparound care alongside nurseries or schools. Childminders are also consistently rated, through independent inspection by the Care Inspectorate, as providing high quality childcare across all quality criteria.

Childminding in the context of the early learning and childcare expansion

Funded early learning and childcare (ELC) is available to all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds.¹ From August 2021, the entitlement increased to 1,140 hours a year (30 hours a week if taken during term time).² The expansion of funded ELC, originally intended for August 2020, was paused in April 2020 to give local authorities the flexibility to focus on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.³ The main aims of the ELC expansion are:

- children's development improves and the attainment gap narrows
- parents' opportunities to take up work, training or study increase
- family wellbeing improves through enhanced nurture and support.

In order to ensure that the funded ELC entitlement is delivered in high quality settings, the Scottish Government published Funding Follows the Child and National Standard for ELC Providers, including the more in-depth Operating Guidance, on 18 December 2018.⁴ The Funding Follows the Child funding approach aims to ensure that funded ELC is flexible to the needs of families – in other words, parents should

¹ [More information on the eligibility criteria for two year olds](#)

² [A Blueprint for 2020: Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland](#)

³ [Early education and care: early learning and childcare expansion](#)

⁴ [Funding Follows the Child and National Standard for ELC Providers](#); this was followed by [Interim Guidance](#) in July 2020 and an [Update](#) to the guidance in 2021.

be free to use their funded hours at any childcare provider/s who meet the National Standard, including childminders. The National Standard is the set of quality criteria that all funded providers in the public, private and third sectors need to meet to offer the funded entitlement.

In order to deliver funded hours, childminders will be expected to meet the same 10 criteria as other types of ELC provider. The National Standard Interim Guidance and Operating Guidance include more information on how these criteria will apply in a childminding setting.⁵

Subject to local availability, Funding Follows the Child will also enable parents and carers to opt for a 'blended model', where the child's funded hours are split between ELC providers. Blended models commonly involve a child spending part of their ELC day/week in a private or public sector nursery, and part with a childminder. Blended models can offer greater flexibility for parents and carers.

Background to the study

The current study was designed to complement the ongoing Scottish Study of Early Learning and Childcare (SSELC)⁶, which is evaluating the impact of the ELC expansion on children, parents and carers, and families. The SSELC is gathering quantitative data from formal group settings (i.e. local authority or private nurseries) only and does not include childminding services providing funded ELC.

Childminders can play an important role in supporting the aims of the ELC expansion. Childminding services are evaluated as high quality overall in Care Inspectorate setting quality assessments – for example, in 2019, 92% of childminding services were rated as good or better in all quality themes assessed, compared with 88% of day care of children services.⁷ Childminding services can also play a role in improving flexibility and accessibility for parents. Overall, if childminding services were to play a more prominent role in the ELC expansion, families could potentially have more choice about the type, location and hours of funded ELC they can access. Further, childminders will have an important role in future policy development, for example the extension of funded ELC to include younger children (for which provision will need to be different to that for three and four year olds) and the development of a new system of wraparound childcare.

There is already some existing evidence on the benefits of ELC provision by childminders. This includes: preliminary observational evidence from the 14 ELC Expansion Trials (including a perception from parents that increased access to opportunities, particularly outdoor learning, had a positive impact on their child's learning and behaviour)⁸, a recent English study which found that, among children

⁵ [Funding follows the child and the national standard for early learning and childcare providers: operating guidance](#); [Funding follows the child and the national standard for early learning and childcare providers: interim guidance - update March 2021](#)

⁶ The [Phase 3 report of SSELC was published in December 2020](#)

⁷ [Care Inspectorate, Early Learning and Childcare statistics 2019](#)

⁸ [Early Learning and Childcare Expansion delivery trials: evaluation](#)

classed as moderately disadvantaged, more hours with a childminder (compared with ELC in group settings or informal care) was associated with fewer negative emotional symptoms⁹, and other studies, including several undertaken by Ipsos MORI, have found that childminders provide increased flexibility for parents, including wraparound care and pick up/drop off from nursery¹⁰.

Aims, objectives and research questions

Overall, however, there is a lack of evidence on provision by childminders and its impact on child, parent and carer, and family outcomes. This study aimed to develop the evidence base on the existing and potential impact of childminding services on child, parent and carer, and family outcomes, in the context of the ELC expansion. It has done this by assessing what aspects of childminding are considered to contribute to improving outcomes for children and their families in Scotland, according to childminders and parents and carers using childminding services.

More specifically, the research sought to answer the following questions from the point of view of childminders and parents and carers. These were amended slightly (largely to include the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic) and were confirmed when the contract was restarted in November 2020.

Childminder research questions

- What does good quality childminding mean to childminders? What are childminders' perceptions of the benefits/outcomes for children as a result of receiving the services?
- Are there particular groups of children for whom childminding services / blended models are seen as especially beneficial (e.g. children with Additional Support Needs, younger children)?
- How do childminders think the childminding context supports / constrains improving children's outcomes? (E.g. home-care environment, low adult to child ratios, support for transitions to group settings). In what ways has the COVID-19 pandemic affected their ability to support children's outcomes?
- How do childminders think their services support parents and carers/families? In what ways has the COVID-19 pandemic affected their ability to support families?
- What are childminders' future intentions? What impact has the pandemic had on their services? What impact has the pandemic had on childminders' abilities to provide funded ELC? Has it created any long-term barriers for providing funded ELC in the future?

⁹ [Impact Study on Early Education Use and Child Outcomes](#)

¹⁰ For example: [Early Learning and Childcare: the experiences of parents](#)

Parent / carer research questions

- What does good quality childminding mean to parents/carers? What do they look for from childminding services in terms of their children's development? How do they see childminding compared to formal group settings?
- What are parent/carers' perceptions of the benefits/outcomes for their children as a result of receiving the services? Are there particular groups of children for whom childminding services / blended models are seen as especially beneficial (e.g. children with Additional Support Needs, younger children)?
- How do parents/carers think using childminding services impacts them/their families?
- What are parents/carers' future plans? Among parents/carers who have started using childminding services since the start of the pandemic, do they plan to continue using them, and why? Would they consider using childminding services as part of their children's funded ELC? Among parents/carers who relied on children/family services that closed due to the pandemic, do they plan to return to these services and why?

Overview of the research design

A qualitative method was considered most appropriate to meet the above objectives and fully explore the experiences and views of participants. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, telephone in-depth interviews were chosen as the best way to gather the data (the original plan was to conduct some face-to-face and some by telephone). Interviews were completed in March and April 2021 with 26 childminders and 26 parents or carers. All of these lasted around one hour and were conducted by the authors of this report. The discussion guides used by the researchers can be found in Appendix 1.

The research was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for Market Research, ISO 20252.

Sampling

The aim in qualitative research is not to achieve a sample that is statistically representative of the wider population, but to include a range of participants in different circumstances in order to identify the range of different experiences. Sample plans were designed to enable this and the following tables show the profile of the participants.

Table 1. Profile of parents interviewed

Criteria		
Using ELC funded hours?	No (some were not eligible yet)	12
	Yes – at least some with childminder	9
	Yes – but not with childminder	5
How long they have used their current childminding service	Since before March 2020	18
	Since March 2020	8
Age of children	Under 3 (this did not include any 'eligible 2s')	7
	3-4	19
Work status of parent interviewed	Full time	10
	Part time	10
	Self employed	1
	Education/Training	3
	Not working	2
Rurality	Urban	15
	Accessible rural	6
	Remote rural	5
SIMD (1 not known)	SIMD 1 (most deprived)	4
	SIMD 2	5
	SIMD 3	7
	SIMD 4	3
	SIMD 5 (least deprived)	6
From an ethnic minority group	Yes	4
Single parent	Yes	5
Child with additional support needs	Yes	3
Local authority	Parents from 14 different local authorities were included	

Table 2. Profile of childminders interviewed

Criteria		
Whether providing funded ELC	Yes	13
	No	13
Age of children currently caring for	Only pre-school	7
	Both pre-school and school age	19
Number of children currently caring for across a week	1-2	5
	3-4	5
	5+	16
Rurality	Urban	14
	Accessible rural	9
	Remote rural	3
SIMD ¹¹ (4 not known)	SIMD 1 (most deprived)	1
	SIMD 2	2
	SIMD 3	6
	SIMD 4	6
	SIMD 5 (least deprived)	7
From an ethnic minority	Yes	1
Currently caring for child/children with additional support needs	Yes	7
Providing community childminding service	Yes	4
Local authority	Childminders from 17 different local authorities were included	

Recruitment

Recruitment of childminders and parents was undertaken with the support of the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA). Emails were sent out to SCMA members inviting them to take part, and asking them to forward on information to parents and carers so that they may also participate. Childminders and parents then contacted the research team directly and answered a screening questionnaire to check eligibility and, if eligible, arrange a suitable time for the interviews.

Communications provided reassurances about anonymity and that the study was not seeking to judge or rate individual providers (see Appendix 2). In order to meet some of the criteria in the sample plan, the SCMA sent further emails and social media updates to target groups where there had been a lower response (e.g. those in rural areas). This helped us recruit a broad mix of childminders and parents. While we invited parents and carers to participate, we did not manage to recruit any carers, nor did we speak to any fathers. Those that got in touch were all mothers of the children using a childminding service. All the childminders that took part were also female (this reflects the gender balance within the sector¹²).

¹¹ [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#). Based on postcode of childminder's premises.

¹² See [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2019 Workforce Data](#) (p.38)

We refer to ‘parents’ rather than ‘parents and carers’ throughout the main findings of this report which is reflective of our sample.

Interviewing

Interviews took place over the telephone in March and April 2021 and were facilitated by members of the research team. Two discussion guides were used – one for childminders and one for parents (included in Appendix 1). These covered key questions and a number of more detailed prompts that were used as required to ensure all relevant issues were covered. Interviews were audio recorded (with permission from participants) for subsequent analysis. Participants were given £30 as a thank you for their time.

Analysis

The interview data were summarised into thematic matrices¹³ developed by the research team and drawing on the research questions. These thematic matrices were then reviewed to identify the full range of views and experiences on each issue. The research team then undertook analysis meetings to discuss findings and agree key points for this report.

Challenges and limitations

All research is subject to challenges and limitations. On this project, while communications from the SCMA garnered a very good response from childminders and parents, there were some groups that we were unable to recruit. Overall, our sample provides a good mix of experiences and circumstances, but ideally, we would have liked to have included the following: parents or carers of 2 years olds eligible for funded ELC, fathers, and male childminders.

Participants were self-selecting which may mean that the sample of parents is skewed towards those that are especially satisfied with their childminder (given we asked them to tell us about the benefits of childminding). The sample of childminders may also be skewed towards childminders who are currently happy in their role and keen to talk about the benefits of childminding. While this does not negatively affect the quality of the data gathered, because our aim was to explore perceptions of good quality childminding and the potential positive impact of childminding, it should be kept in mind the sample will not be representative of all parents using childminders or of all childminders.

A further limitation of this research project is that it only included parents who were already using childminders. Exploring the perceptions of parents who are not using childminders, and may never have considered using a childminder, would be valuable in identifying further ways to promote childminding and to test and develop promotional materials.

It should also be noted that where the prevalence of a particular view is described in this report, using terms such as “some” or “a few”, this relates only to the sample of

¹³ Using Excel, with each column representing a theme and each row an individual interview, so that the data can be sorted in different ways for further analysis.

research participants and not the wider population of parents and childminders in Scotland.

While we have been able to look for indicative patterns in the data by demographic group (e.g. SIMD quintile, rurality), the data did not show any clear differences between or within groups. Analysis by local authority area was not possible because that would require much larger sample sizes across all 32 areas.

Perceptions of other types of childcare

This report describes the experiences and perceptions of childminding and other types of childcare held by childminders and parents. Participants were asked about the benefits of childminding in comparison to both informal care (mainly by grandparents) and nursery settings. It should be kept in mind that comments around other types of care were made in this context, by parents and professionals with a personal preference for childminding. Some comments from participants imply a criticism of nurseries (in particular). While some of the childminders interviewed had previously worked in nurseries, and some of the parents interviewed had experience of nurseries, their comments are based on their own personal experiences and perceptions and will not necessarily reflect other parents' experiences or practice at all nurseries.

We are not attempting to objectively assess the relative merits of different types of childcare in this study. We also recognise that some of the perceived benefits of childminding may also be delivered in other settings.

Report structure and conventions

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 discusses perceptions of **how childminding supports children**
- Chapter 3 examines perceptions of **how childminding supports families**
- Chapter 4 covers views **combining childminding with other forms of childcare**
- Chapter 5 looks at **the impact of pandemic** has had on childminders and parents
- Chapter 6 explores perceptions of **funded ELC** among childminders and parents
- Chapter 7 covers views on **the promotion of childminding** including perceived misconceptions about it as a profession, and makes recommendations based on these views

Each chapter includes a summary of main findings at the start. Interviewees are identified by some basic demographic information only in order to preserve anonymity. The views of childminders and parents are generally presented together in the following chapters, as there was little divergence between them. Where views are particularly from one group, this is highlighted in the text.

2. Perceptions of how childminding supports children

Summary of main findings

THE CHILDMINDING SETTING

- There was a view among childminder and parent participants that the cosy, homely environment in a childminding setting supports children's emotional wellbeing, which in turn supports their learning and development.
- Participants thought that the small numbers of children in a childminding setting means there is more time for one-to-one attention and thus more personalised care, supporting a range of outcomes. This was seen as particularly beneficial for children with additional support needs and younger children/babies.
- There was a widespread view that the mix of ages at a childminder supports children's learning and development as younger children can learn from the older children, and the older children can become more nurturing and learn to help the younger ones.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHILD AND THEIR CHILDMINDER

- There was broad consensus that childminders have a professional approach to care. There was also a perception that childminders have a more professional approach to care and more experience supporting different children than most grandparents or relatives offering informal care.

ACTIVITIES AND ROUTINES

- There was a belief that (mainly due to low numbers) childminders are more flexible than nurseries, meaning they can be more spontaneous and 'child-led' when planning activities.
- At the same time as being less structured than a nursery, there was a perception that childminders do a wider range of activities with children and have more resources than relatives providing informal care, furthering their learning and development.
- There was a perception that childminders are able to offer certain types of activities that a nursery cannot, for example more trips, spending more time outdoors and in the local community, and more domestic activities such as laying the table.

This chapter firstly explores the perceived benefits of childminding for children, including how it compares to other types of childcare and whether certain children are particularly suited to this form of care. Benefits are grouped into four key features of childminding: the childminding environment; the relationship between children and their childminder; the professional role of the childminder; and the types of activities

childminders can provide. The remainder of the chapter outlines perceived limitations of childminding for children. The views of childminders and parents are presented together, as there was little divergence between them. Where views are particularly from one group, this is highlighted in the text.

The childminding setting

a) The home environment

The benefits of the 'home environment' childminders can provide to children was a strong theme among childminders and parents which often came up unprompted.

An important point to note is that participants used the phrase 'home(ly) environment' to refer to various aspects of childminding which were felt to mirror what children would experience if they were looked after by their own family. This included the space itself; the smaller numbers of children; the mix of ages; the continuity of care; and the types of activities on offer. This section focuses specifically on the space itself and the fact that childminders provide care for children in their own homes. Other factors that were seen to contribute to creating a homely atmosphere are discussed in subsequent sections.

There was a perception that being in a home environment is more comfortable and 'cosy' than a nursery setting, and that this supports children's general wellbeing. For example, at a childminder, children can sit on the sofa or have a nap in a bed. The comfortable setting was seen as especially beneficial if a child is in childcare for a long period of time in a day.

Childminders' homes were described as a 'home from home', a 'second home', or 'an extension of home' for children. It was suggested (by parents and childminders alike) that children know the setting very well, which makes them feel more secure. The continuity between home and the childminder setting was seen as particularly beneficial for children going to a childminder on a part time basis.

"They treat the home as their own."

Childminder for 20 years, Renfrewshire

While the home setting was mainly linked with children feeling more settled and happier in their environment, some participants also linked it to children's outcomes. There was a view that feeling comfortable is an important precursor to children being able to focus on activities that support their learning and development. One parent mentioned that the home environment had a positive impact on her child's behaviour, as being at a childminder taught them how to act in a home setting that wasn't their own, for example not putting your feet on the sofa.

"I think it's good having a homely environment, he feels more comfortable. When you're confident and comfortable your learning comes on."

Parent of 4 year old, using childminder, West Lothian

Being away from home was seen as good for children in order to stimulate them and enable them to get used to being away from their parents. However, the comforting, homely setting of a childminder was considered to be less intimidating than a nursery and therefore helped maximise the benefits of being away from home without children becoming overwhelmed. This was seen as helping children build confidence, which could be particularly useful before transitioning to a larger setting.

“They’re able to be cared for in a different setting, away from home, in a small homely setting. I think [childminding]’s a great starter pre-nursery.

Childminder for 6 years, Scottish Borders

One childminder providing community childminding services¹⁴ also highlighted the importance of a calm, homely atmosphere to support children coming to her from chaotic households or to escape a crisis at home.

b) The number of children

Participants described numerous perceived benefits for children of spending time in a small group at a childminder.

A strong theme was the benefit of having low numbers of children to care-givers at a childminder compared to a nursery. There was a perception that this allows childminders to get to know the children they provide care for very well, which increases their ability to understand and respond to their individual needs. This was seen as particularly beneficial for quieter children who may ‘fade into the background’ in a larger setting.

“We have the lower ratio, we have more knowledge of the child. You can’t expect nursery staff to know their children inside out. I can tell you a lot about them.”

Childminder for 11 years, Aberdeenshire

Participants reported having had experiences where nursery staff had not picked up on children’s needs, for example failing to identify signs of learning difficulties that were picked up instead by a childminder.

“If he’s a bit slower it’s picked up better in a one-on-one setting. [...] Things weren’t happening in nursery because things were getting passed to the next person.”

Parent of 3 year old, using childminder (and had used nursery for older child), South Lanarkshire

¹⁴ SCMA delivers Community Childminding services in different parts of Scotland through contracts with local authorities. Specially trained childminders provide supported family interventions to families referred to these services by health visitors or social work. These services support families who may be one step away from crisis and whatever is happening at a parental level (mental health, addiction, terminal illness, bereavement) is impacting on young children such as through the development of, for example, attachment disorders, and this has been picked up by professionals.

It was suggested that the ability of childminders to provide more one-to-one care was particularly important for younger children and babies who require a high level of attention and who are less able to communicate their needs verbally.

“I certainly think that younger children benefit far more. The youngest was five weeks old, I can’t begin to imagine putting them into a nursery. [...] I’ve had younger children here that have been taken out of nursery, they were overwhelmed, so day caring got in contact with me. The difference with their behaviour was night and day.”

Childminder for 20 years, Renfrewshire

While all ELC settings are required to support additional needs, some participants also saw smaller numbers as important for children with additional support needs in ensuring they get the level of care and attention they require and supporting their learning and development. This was a point made by childminders in particular.

“I definitely think for our three with additional needs we’ve had a huge impact on their development. [...] We know because [one of them] went to nursery and to us. They just didn’t have the patience, I don’t know. He benefits and does much more here. He just wasn’t coping with mainstream nursery or school. [The child] who was born profoundly deaf really needed the home from home environment. She needs to know where I am. She couldn’t have gone to nursery at 40 hours a week. We know which signs she uses but the school aren’t geared up for sign language yet.”

Childminder for 11 years, Aberdeenshire

Smaller numbers also mean childminders are typically a quieter setting, which was also seen as a benefit for children with additional support needs. For example, children with autism or other conditions may find it difficult to cope with a noisy environment, while others may become over stimulated.

“One of the wee boys that has difficulties, he’s now back two days a week [at nursery] and he hates it and says it’s so noisy. There’s so many people and it’s quite intense and a lot going on. Some children thrive in that, but others get lost.”

Childminder for 5 years, Glasgow

A childminder who provided care for a child with complex additional needs highlighted that one-to-one care in a group setting is not the same quality of one-to-one care in a childminding setting, due to the unpredictability and distraction of other children in the environment. The same point was made by the following parent:

“One to one at a nursery isn’t really one to one, you’re still aware of everyone else. There are challenges, other children, they can introduce other problems.”

Parent of 4 year old, using childminder and nursery, Moray

Another perceived benefit of the lower numbers was that it helped childminders to monitor children's behaviour more closely than would be possible for staff in a larger setting. This enables childminders to better support positive behavioural outcomes for children through rewarding good behaviours and picking up on negative behaviour early on, which can then be 'nipped in the bud'. There was a view that childminders could particularly benefit children displaying disruptive behaviours, as they have more time to calm them down and observe what might be triggering their behaviour.

"I think they can start becoming a bit aggressive in nursery, a bit 'survival of the fittest'. If you're strongest and loudest you can snatch your toys. But you can see [this behaviour] from the smaller environment at the childminder. We can work on it."

Parent of 2 year old and 6 month old, using childminder and nursery,
Renfrewshire

Participants also referenced cases where parents had started using a childminder after their children found nursery overwhelming; the limited number of children at a childminder was believed to help children to socialise and build confidence more easily before going onto a group setting. This was seen as a particular benefit for children who are shy or less confident generally, as well as those with additional support needs.

"Some children find a bigger group quite stifling but are more happy to come forward in a small group."

Childminder for 5 years, Renfrewshire

Furthermore, it was highlighted that spending time in a smaller group allows children to get to know each other very well and form close relationships, helping to develop their social skills. It was felt that having a small number of children means childminders are more aware of the dynamics of the group and are able to actively support them to build healthy relationships, including helping to mediate disputes.

"They enjoy seeing the same group each time and having a small group. [...] When there is a falling out we can work and build those relationships. I'm more aware of the dynamics and I can guide them. I can explain that 'maybe it's because you're not sharing'."

Childminder for 3 years, Midlothian

Smaller numbers were also seen as providing more scope for children to be in different spaces at a childminder, increasing their level of choice and control compared with a nursery where they tend to have to be in the same place at the same time. For example, some may choose to be in the garden while others are in a quiet indoors space.

While participants tended to focus on the benefits of having a smaller group of children at a childminder than a nursery, the fact that there are typically more

children than there are when receiving informal care from grandparents or other relatives was also described as a benefit, particularly for children without siblings. Childminding was seen as giving children an important opportunity to socialise and learn how to interact with other children. For example, one childminder described providing care for a child who had previously been looked after by his grandparents who had 'never had to share before' he came to her. Others had experienced children developing sibling-style relationships with other children in the setting.

It was suggested that mixing with other children at a childminder can support children to transition from being at home to being at a larger group setting at a nursery through building their confidence and social skills.

"Exposure to other children is important – I'm basing that on friends who say their child is a bit more timid. We want our son to be confident. He doesn't let other older children push him around. If I'd have been a full time mum there's a level of shelter, he would suddenly go from being with no children to twenty or thirty children."

Parent of 2 year old, using a childminder, East Dunbartonshire

c) The mix of children

In addition to the small numbers of children at a childminder, participants thought that the mix of children had several benefits, particularly the mix of ages cared for together, which children do not typically experience in a nursery setting.

There was a widespread view that mixing with different age groups supports children's learning and development as the younger children treat the older children as role models and the older children learn by caring for the younger children.

"I find the after-school [children] seem to encourage the little ones more [...] they help them, make them snacks. It gives them a feeling of being the big ones, and the younger ones learn from older ones. [...] During the day it's only her and one other boy- he's older and her development's come on leaps and bounds compared to my friends with kids the same age. They do activities to prep the other boy for school and my daughter hates to be left out so she's doing them too. Shape recognition/patterns etc., she wouldn't have got that in a nursery setting."

Parent of 3 year old, using a childminder, Aberdeenshire

"If you've got one lagging, a more advanced or older one can pull them along."

Childminder for 17 years, Renfrewshire

The fact that childminders can provide care for different ages of children was seen as a particular benefit for siblings who would otherwise have been split up into different groups at a nursery. Siblings may find it comforting to be together and can support each other. Childminders also noted that any negative sibling dynamics that

could be missed in a nursery setting can be picked up by a childminder, who can then support them to improve the relationship.

“There’s a safety about having your sibling with you. If you’re feeling a bit rough or anxious you can take it out on your sibling rather than other children. I’ve been able to help support siblings [...] sibling fighting is quite a big deal.”

Childminder for 5 years, Glasgow

In comparison to informal care, children at a childminder are, however, typically mixing with children from different families and backgrounds, which was seen as beneficial for developing an awareness of difference and improving behaviour and social skills.

“Teaches children to be tolerant and understand, how to share, especially if they don’t have siblings, especially important during the pandemic.”

Childminder for 2 years, Edinburgh

At the same time, childminders in particular pointed out that they may be able to more actively connect children who get on well or who share similar experiences, due to their more informal relationships with families compared to a nursery.

“Parents were splitting up and we asked if we could tell another family with same experience so the children could talk.”

Childminder for 11 years, Aberdeenshire

The relationship between the child and childminder

The benefits of the continuity of care that a childminder was seen as providing and the close relationship that participants felt children formed with their childminder was a particularly strong theme across interviews with parents and childminders.

a) Continuity of care

There was broad consensus among participants that continuity of care from an individual childminder was a major benefit for children, as childminders get to know each child “inside out” and were seen as being able to provide more personalised care. For example, they will get to know a child’s learning style, recognise what mood they are in or how tired they are, and be able to respond appropriately. This was contrasted with nursery care where it was perceived that children may be looked after by a number of different staff members who may also change over time.

“[Our childminder] knows her one hundred percent, knows what she likes, doesn’t like, if she’s in a sulky mood.”

Parent of 2 year old, using childminder, Aberdeenshire

Participants explained that childminders can build up rapport and trust with children over time, which helps children to feel safe and relaxed in the setting.

“She doesn’t have to get to know and trust multiple people. Not switching round different shifts and different days. She recognises [the childminder]. That’s something that’s benefitted her.”

Parent of 2 year old, using childminder, Falkirk

There was an appreciation that childminders can provide continuity of care not just throughout any one day or week, but over the long-term, as they are able to provide care for different ages of children and adapt their care as children progress and develop.

“A childminder is able to help at the baby stage, preschool stage and wraparound stage – if she was not at the childminder, we would have had to make changes along the way – so consistency.”

Parent of 7 year old and 4 year old, using childminder and nursery, Fife

Linked to this continuity of care was the ability of childminders to help with transitions (to nursery and to primary school in particular¹⁵). One childminder felt that she had more time than a nursery would to support children with learning to put on their shoes and coats themselves (in preparation for school). Beyond this practical preparation, parents very much valued the social and emotional preparation for transition. This was facilitated by the homely setting, the close relationship between child and childminder, and the small numbers of other children, which enabled a safe and more gradual transition from home to nursery/school.

Continuity of care was mentioned as a particular benefit for younger children, for whom having a trusting relationship with their care-giver is very important.

“In a nursery you will have different key workers, which is maybe not so bad when they’re older. I think when they’re younger they benefit more from a one-to-one where they can build a relationship. It’s almost like they are family. It just makes them more settled.”

Childminder for 20 years, Renfrewshire

The greater perceived continuity of care that childminders can offer was also described as particularly beneficial for children with additional needs where it may take longer to get to know them and their needs, as well as how they communicate.

“He’s nonverbal so it takes a bit of time to get to know him, to get used to each other. At the nursery none of the staff members knew how to read him and it was always different people. Having one constant person enabled him to communicate his needs and settle.”

Childminder for 3 years, Midlothian

“He’s not diagnosed but he has, it’s slightly autistic in terms of sensory needs and his ability to self-regulate emotions and behaviour.

¹⁵ They could also potentially also help with the transition from primary to secondary school but this research was focused on younger children.

[...] But he's just come on leaps and bounds [...] it's just one singular person which is what I think he's needed to learn how to communicate his needs and feelings."

Childminder for 5 years, Glasgow

b) Close relationship between child and family, and childminder

Parents and childminders commented on the closeness of the relationships between childminders and the children they provide care for, in part stemming from the smaller numbers of children, and the continuity of care over time. This relationship was seen as beneficial to children in a variety of ways.

There was a perception among some participants that children would receive more comfort, love and 'warmth' from their childminder than they might do from staff in a nursery setting. For example, there was a belief that childminders give children more hugs, affection and general one-to-one attention.

"She'll sleep in [our childminder]'s arms if she doesn't want to go in her cot."

Parent of 17 month old, using childminder, Highland

"It's a more loving environment. I went to the nursery and I think the environment and the activities and resources are similar but we tell the children we love them and hug them."

Childminder for 11 years, Aberdeenshire

There was also a view that childminders would 'go the extra mile' to nurture and support children to a higher degree compared to nursery staff, for example if children are feeling unwell or are going through a difficult time at home.

"If a wee one has a cold, in a nursery setting they might get sent home, but here you can give them that bit of extra TLC. That's a different level of care."

Childminder for 20 years, Renfrewshire

"One family lost their mum to cancer, they didn't have anyone else, I took the two children and they stayed with me while [their father] was at the hospital. They were with me for 8 weeks. I'll always go that extra mile."

Childminder for 18 years, Stirling

The childminder-child relationship was also described as being important in supporting a child's transition to nursery, as children can get used to being away from their parents for the first time while still having a parental figure to provide comfort and reassurance.

The perception of a childminder as a 'parent-like figure' fits into a broader theme of childminders being perceived as part of a child's 'extended family'. Childminders spoke about being in touch with children they had provided care for, who were now teenagers, demonstrating how strong they can be.

"[Our childminder has a] parent role. It's not like it's staff wearing uniform. It's an informal environment. It's the closest thing to me."

Parent of 2 year old and 6 month old, Renfrewshire

"[Our childminder]'s like an aunty, a trusted person."

Parent of 2 year old, East Dunbartonshire

The relationship between childminders and the families they support was also viewed as potentially closer and less formal compared with a nursery.

"I've visited many of them in their family home [...] we know the aunts and uncles and grandads and cousins etc. they can all come in and be part of the service."

Childminder for 11 years, Aberdeenshire

There was a perception that children can benefit when childminders have close relationships with parents, since childminders and parents can actively work together to ensure children are cared for in a way that is broadly consistent between settings.

"You can work much more closely together [with parents] [...] you get to know much more detail on background – parents are much more open about the situation at home."

Childminder for 17 years, Renfrewshire

Professional approach to care

While both childminders and parents valued the informal dynamic between childminders and the children they provide care for, compared to nursery care, parents also valued the professional approach of childminders in addition to the close, but professional relationship (explored later). There was also an acknowledgement that childminders have a more professional approach to care than most grandparents or relatives offering informal care, which could also be of benefit.

There was a strong view that – as with nursery staff – children benefit from childminders' professional expertise and qualifications, which was contrasted to informal childcare. This was particularly linked to improvements in children's learning and development, based on the fact that childminders will be equipped to identify areas for development and to support children to progress.

"We've been able to give them two days a week of amazing learning – we couldn't do that ourselves."

Parent of 4 year old and 2 year old, using childminder (and nursery for 4 year old), Dumfries and Galloway

“Grannies do an amazing job reading and chilling out and doing fun stuff, but not the level of professional care we’re able to provide [...] [they] might not necessarily notice if a child has difficulty with spatial awareness and wouldn’t necessarily link that to the knowledge base that we would identify. It’s not an educational establishment. It’s just a different angle that they come from.”

Childminder for 5 years, Glasgow

Childminders’ expertise in health and nutrition was seen as enabling them to better support children’s physical wellbeing in comparison with relatives providing informal care. There was a concern that grandparents, in particular, may give children too many unhealthy treats.

One childminder referenced her first aid training and suggested that childminders may be also able to provide a safer environment for children compared to relatives providing informal care.

Another perceived benefit was that childminders keep their knowledge and practice up-to-date, while relatives, particularly grandparents, may have a somewhat outdated approach to childcare.

“My mother looks after our nieces and nephews. She’s in her seventies and she’s old school.”

Parent of 2 year old and 6 month old, Renfrewshire

Participants frequently highlighted that childminders are required to meet certain care standards and are inspected, making them more accountable when it comes to delivering outcomes for children compared to relatives providing informal care.

“Grandparents should be for cuddles and nice memories. A childminder is inspected, has milestones for children to reach.”

Parent of 5 year old and 18 month old, using childminder and nursery (for 5 year old), Renfrewshire

The professional role of the childminder was also seen as supporting positive behaviour outcomes through structure and boundaries.

“The structure, the rules [are a benefit to children]. They need to get ready to go into a learning environment. We have our wee rules and they’re great. Whereas at informal childcare you don’t have the same. [...] We always joke and say it’s ‘bootcamp’. They love a bit of routine and structure.”

Childminder for 11 years, Aberdeenshire

This point was contrasted with care from grandparents, since there was a belief that grandparents would be more likely to tolerate bad behaviour and ‘spoil’ children.

“[My daughter]’s wrapped my dad round her finger, has him doing anything.”

Parent of 2 year old, using childminder and informal care from relatives, Falkirk

A further perceived advantage of childminders over informal childcare was that, because caring for children is a childminder’s job, it is their first priority and they are entirely focused on the children. This was contrasted to childcare from relatives, who participants felt were more likely to be distracted.

“It’s a childminder’s job to bring out the best in the child. We have more time to dedicate to that.”

Childminder for 6 years, Scottish Borders

“Their whole focus is on the kids. They don’t need to stop and do housework, or nip to ASDA etc. [My daughter]’s learnt more. If I’d known that I’d have started her earlier.”

Parent of 2 year old, using childminder, Falkirk

Parents also highlighted the value of childminders’ experience of supporting different children which they have built up over time. This was mentioned as a particular benefit for children of first-time parents.

“The amount that [my daughter] learns is quite scary. [...] [Childminders] have got a lot of experience teaching them to do things as well, in comparison to a first time mum.”

Parent of 4 year old, using childminder and nursery, Moray

Activities and routines

The routines and activities that childminders can provide was another key theme when participants discussed benefits of childminding for children.

There was a belief that (mainly due to low numbers) childminders are more flexible than nurseries, meaning they can be more ‘child-led’ when planning activities. There was a strong view that this benefits children as childminders are able to tailor activities to suit individual interests or developmental needs. Participants emphasised the variety of interests different children have and how, by incorporating this into daily activities, childminders can nurture children’s natural curiosity and support their development.

Participants highlighted childminders’ ability to be spontaneous and how this contributed to their ‘child-led’ approach by adapting activities to what children want to do on the day. Childminding was often described as giving children more ‘freedom’ to choose what they want to do and allow them to go at their own pace. For example, if they are tired, they can have a nap or watch television, which may not be an option at a nursery.

“Kids are all very different in what they are interested in, for example cars or things with wheels, bugs, soft toys. There’s no way on earth you can be as flexible in a nursery – you do try but you just can’t. So [we provide] a much more responsive care package from one day to a next. For example, you can follow up immediately on something that happened the day before, for example buy a wormery if they’ve shown an interest in bugs.”

Childminder for 4 years, East Lothian

However, a more exceptional and contrasting view was that the greater range of activities on offer at a nursery gave children more choice (see Limitations below).

Childminders’ flexibility was also described as enhancing children’s general health and wellbeing, for example being able to accommodate a different nap routine in a way that nurseries may not be able to.

At the same time as being less structured than a nursery, there was a perception that childminders do more organised activities with children than relatives providing informal care, which furthers their learning and development.

“All grandparents are different, but they wouldn’t do that much with her – probably quite a lot of TV, they wouldn’t take her out.”

Parent of 7 year old and 4 year old, using childminder and nursery (for 4 year old), Fife

A parent of a child with complex needs explained that her childminder has time to do fun and educational activities with her son that she can’t provide at home, due to being busy taking care of his physical needs as well as the rest of the family.

“When he’s at home I’m focusing on his physical needs. At the childminder she’s supported about that, I send her food etc. so she focuses on fun things and educational things. [Things] he wouldn’t get if just with me or in a group.”

Parent of 4 year old, Midlothian

Another benefit highlighted by participants was that childminders can work closely with parents when planning activities, enabling them to provide some continuity between what children are doing at home and in the childminding setting.

“My childminder asks what we’re working towards or what I’d like her to focus on. She’s also asked if I’d like her to look at homework or tying laces, life skills, socialisation, things like that. It reinforces what I’m doing.”

Parent of 6 year old and 4 year old, using childminder and nursery (for 4 year old), Fife

There was a perception that childminders are able to offer certain types of activities that would be more difficult for a nursery in particular more frequent and a greater

range of trips. Examples ranged from local toddler groups and soft play centres, to going on day trips to beaches or safari parks.

“It’s very easy for me to get in the car and go to the beach or the woods, whereas you wouldn’t have that flexibility in a nursery.”

Childminder for 10 years, Aberdeenshire

There was a view that childminders will typically have better resources compared to relatives providing informal care.

“I’m sure grandparents do baking and bits and pieces. They might not have quite the same resources. I’m happy to bulk buy something because I know there’s gonna be a few children using it.

Childminder for 5 years, Renfrewshire

A common perception among participants was that children benefit from doing more outdoor activities with a childminder compared to with relatives or at some nurseries.

It was also suggested that it is easier for childminders than nurseries to take children into the community on a regular basis, giving them experience of everyday activities such as going to the shops and learning how to socialise with other adults. This was believed to positively impact on children’s confidence.

“I can take them into the community. [...] You would meet people in the park in a more natural environment, go into the butchers or the pet shop or other shops, a much more natural learning experience for them. I try to make these visits a learning experience for them but in a less formal way.”

Childminder for 5 years, Glasgow

At the same time, it was suggested that the ‘at home’ setting means childminding gives children the opportunity to participate in more domestic activities compared to a nursery, such as baking or helping with tasks like laying the table or doing the washing up. In addition to learning these practical skills, this provides further variety of opportunities to develop language, social skills and confidence.

Summary of perceived positive outcomes for children

Table 3 (overleaf) provides an overview of the perceived benefits and positive outcomes for children. It is based on the perceptions of both parents and childminders and illustrates the closely interlinked nature of key features of childminding and positive outcomes.

Table 3. Summary of perceived benefits and positive outcomes for children

Outcome → Feature ↓	Responsive / tailored care (inc. more attention for babies, more suitable for some with ASN)	Supports wellbeing, emotional development & confidence	Supports increasing independence (& transition to nursery)	Specific emotional & development needs met	Social skills development / close friendships	Learning & development (incl. beyond what informal care provides)
Home setting	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Low number of children	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mix of children (backgrounds, ages, siblings together)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Continuity of care	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Close relationship with childminder & warm, loving environment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Professional knowledge & expertise of childminders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Child-led approach to planning, ability to be spontaneous	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Links with best practice guidance

Realising the Ambition: Being Me¹⁶ (2021) sets out national practice guidance for early years in Scotland and is based on current research and evidence on how children develop and learn. This research is not intended to assess the extent to which childminders are adhering to best practice guidelines (that is the role of the Care Inspectorate) but it may be useful to highlight some of the ways in which the perceived benefits for children link with guidance on best practice in relation to supporting children's learning development (note that the following list is not comprehensive):

- The child-led approach is in line with the guidance that “Child-centred play pedagogy requires us to take the lead from the children. This approach actively responds to the individual and constantly changing needs of a young child.” (Realising the Ambition, p.46).
- The home setting, with its variety of spaces and (often) outdoor space, and excursions into the local community fits with the recommendation that “Thought needs to be given to the opportunities that different learning spaces provide. Use creative solutions to provide a variety of spaces for the children. Observe how the children use and interact with the outdoor and indoor spaces available and respond to their actions.” (Realising the Ambition, p.46).
- The close relationship between child and childminder and the opportunity to develop relationships with other children, of a mix of ages, provides a “social environment of interactions [which] should provide children with opportunities to continue to develop positive relationships with others; while also supporting and developing an understanding of the notion of boundaries; self-regulation, negotiation and choice”. (Realising the Ambition, p.47).
- The close relationship between childminders and parents (discussed more in the following chapter) facilitates parental engagement and family learning (Realising the Ambition, p.59).

Limitations of childminding for children

There was a general consensus among participants that there were no significant downsides to childminding for children attending the setting, and those who went on to discuss potential limitations typically only did so after being prompted. However, it is important to bear in mind that the sample consisted of committed childminders and parents who had chosen to use a childminder, and so were likely to be highly favourable towards childminding.

The main drawback of childminding for children that was discussed was the impact of being around fewer other children compared to a nursery setting. There was a view that children may not have as many other children to socialise with and would have fewer friends around the same age. It was suggested that this might partially be

¹⁶ [Realising the Ambition: Being me – National practice guidance for early years in Scotland](#)

mitigated by childminders taking children to toddler groups or other social activities in the community, although it was acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has limited these types of activities over the past year.

“To go out to playgroups and have wider social things, it’s not always something you can give the children, the larger social groups. A lot of my childminding career has been COVID. Everything became a lot more difficult.”

Childminder for 3 years, Midlothian

However, there was a view that particularly social or confident children may enjoy spending time in a larger group.

“For that kind of child who thrives in an environment that’s busy or social, nursery or school is the place for them. You can try to fill that gap but can be difficult to engage the children.”

Childminder for 3 years, Midlothian

There was also a view that children who enjoy a greater degree of structure may prefer to be in a nursery setting instead of the more flexible offer of a childminder.

“When my older child went to playgroup, they knew what was happening, at a childminder every day is different [...] so it might not be best for a child that needs more structure.”

Parent of 3 year old, using childminder, Fife

It was noted that childminders may not have the same range of resources as a nursery, for example climbing frames and other expensive equipment. Similarly, it was mentioned that childminders do not have the resource or the numbers to offer some of the activities they would experience at nursery, such as putting on a nativity play, regular football training or having summer fetes. There was also a view that children might have more choice of activity at a nursery on any given day and a nursery would have more things going on at once.

“Some people don’t like certain activities. If you’re childminding you can only do so much.”

Childminder for 3 years, Midlothian

Despite the more dominant view that childminding helps support children transition to nursery or school, some participants mentioned a couple of potential drawbacks too. For example, it was suggested that children who have become friends at a childminder may be upset if they are split up and have to go to different schools; something less likely to happen if they had made friends in a nursery (particularly a nursery attached to a school). One parent wondered if getting used to being at a childminder may make it harder for children to start nursery, although childminders emphasised the work they do with parents to help them feel ready for nursery when they are transitioning.

While there was a general view that childminders would take children out on more trips, one childminder explained that catering for the different ages of children she looked after was limiting in this regard. For example, she has to consider whether the baby needs to sleep and factor in nursery pick up times when making plans.

Finally, although childminders were viewed as highly skilled, they may not always have the specific skills a family needs – for example, despite the general view that childminders can be more attentive to children with special needs, there was one parent who felt that their nursery had a staff member who was more qualified to provide care for her autistic son and was therefore considering whether he should have more time at nursery as part of his blended care.

3. Perceptions of how childminding supports parents and families

Summary of main findings

FLEXIBILITY OF PROVISION

- Flexibility, in terms of the hours offered, was seen as a key benefit by parents and often drove their decision to use a childminder.
- Parents spoke of the peace of mind flexible childminding services provided – they valued there being room for last minute changes and viewed their childminders as accommodating and helpful whenever possible.

CLOSE YET PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP

- Childminders and parents spoke of how close they and their families had become, commonly describing each other as friends and/or feeling like extended family.
- While some parents described becoming friends with their childminder, they also felt that they benefited from the professional aspect of their relationship, which meant they felt comfortable being clear about their requirements.

FREQUENT CONTACT AND COMMUNICATION

- Frequent contact and communication played an important role in building the relationship between parents and childminders. Childminders often used private Facebook Groups or WhatsApp to update parents throughout the day or to discuss practical matters.
- Parents emphasised the value of the time available to speak to their childminder at drop off and pick up. This was seen by parents as an advantage over nursery pick up and drop offs.

PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE

- The expertise and knowledge of childminders was seen as a major benefit. Parents particularly commented on this in comparison to informal care. Parents spoke of making use of their childminder's experience and knowledge to help them support their child through specific issues or stages.

AN EXTRA LEVEL OF SUPPORT – GOING 'ABOVE AND BEYOND'

- There was a general sense among parents that childminders are often willing to support families in additional ways, which they would not receive from other formal childcare settings.
- Some participants described difficulties their family had gone through and how their childminder had been there for them – providing both practical and emotional support. As such, childminding was viewed by many not just as a form of childcare, but also as a form of family support

This chapter covers how childminding settings support parents and families – including any perceived unique features or advantages childminding offers in comparison with other types of childcare. It describes the perceived outcomes of using a childminder including positive outcomes and limitations or challenges. This chapter draws on data gathered from both childminders and parents. However, we refer more often to the direct experiences of parents, as their perspective on the impacts of childminding for themselves and their families is particularly key.

It focuses predominantly on the features of childminding that have not been covered in the previous chapter. Because they are primarily concerned with the wellbeing of their children, perceived benefits for children were often perceived as also benefiting parents – for example, participants often spontaneously referred to features such as smaller numbers and continuity of care when asked about benefits for parents. In this chapter, therefore, we focus more on other ways in which childminding is perceived to support parents.

The chapter also focuses on features that participants believed were unique or particular to childminding, rather than benefits of childcare in general. In this context, it is again important to keep in mind that this report reflects parents' perceptions and own experiences and does not attempt to objectively compare or assess other types of childcare (e.g. nurseries or informal care) with childminding – some of the benefits identified by parents may, in fact, also be delivered in other settings.

Features of childminding that parents view as beneficial to them

The following sections outline the main features parents described when asked about how childminding benefits them. The views of childminders are also included where relevant. As noted in the previous chapter, there was no major divergence of parent and childminder views on the benefits.

a) Flexibility of provision

The flexible hours childminders offer are seen as a key benefit by parents and often drive their decision to use a childminder. Parents spoke of flexibility in terms of the hours offered, whether that was early starts, late finishes or weekend care; or ad hoc or last minute arrangements. Childminders were very aware that this flexibility is a key reason why parents choose them instead of nursery provision:

“We can be more flexible... I can get the children ready for bed in time for mum who is finishing work late.”

Childminder for 7 years, Fife

Both childminders and parents recognised that flexible hours are particularly beneficial to people who work shifts or have unusual working patterns. Parents working in certain jobs said they would be unable to work without childminders because no one else could provide the hours they needed to cover their time at work.

“We were looking at nursery and [my] changing work hours. The nursery we used couldn't have worked. She [our childminder] was

able to be super flexible. She could do pick ups, she could take our daughter too and do an extra day.”

Parent of 3 year old and 1 year old, using nursery and childminder Dumfries and Galloway

Childminders’ ability and willingness to provide a flexible service gave parents peace of mind – there is room for last minute changes and if something comes up (e.g. a parent has to work later than planned) a childminder will usually be able to accommodate that, unlike a nursery. This was seen as making life less stressful for parents:

“Even silly wee things like if we’re running late or we need to drop him off early she’s a bit more flexible than what a private nursery would be... Not long ago our car was off the road. I thought I’m just going to walk down in the snow, and she’d offered to pick her up in the bigger car. She was dead helpful.”

Parent of 2 year old, Fife, only using childminder

In addition to helping make parents’ day-to-day lives less stressful, parents also shared examples of very difficult family experiences, where their childminders’ support with last minute childcare had made a significant difference to their family’s wellbeing:

“She’s gone above and beyond, it’s just in her nature. When our three year old was diagnosed [with a serious illness] we were blue-lighted to Edinburgh, our five year old stayed with her... she always offered to take her if we needed a break.”

Parent of 5 year old and 3 year old, using a childminder, Scottish Borders

‘Peace of mind’ was a major theme that ran throughout discussions with parents. In addition to childminders’ flexibility, several of the features covered below were also perceived to contribute to peace of mind and a reduction in stress for parents.

b) Close yet professional relationship between childminders and parents

Childminders and parents both spoke of how close they and their families had become. Their own relationship with their childminder was viewed by parents as quite different to how they might relate to a nursery key worker, not least because of the continuity of that relationship – there was a perception that nursery key workers can change quite frequently, and that they may not always be present or have time to talk at drop off/pick up.

“You have a closer relationship with the childminder, I have a much better bond with her than I would nursery staff.”

Parent of 11 year old and 1 year old, using a childminder, Highland

Parents and childminders alike described getting to know and trust each other to the point that they commonly described each other as friends and/or feeling like extended family.

“It feels like sending him to a grandparent's house, I don't worry, he's so looked after.”

Parent of 9 year old and 3 year old, using a childminder South Lanarkshire

While some parents described becoming friends with their childminder, they also felt that they benefited from the professional aspect of their relationship, which meant they felt comfortable being clear about their childcare requirements (e.g. around naps, routines, etc.). This was specifically mentioned in the context of considering the benefits of childminding compared with informal care. Concerns were expressed by some parents that family members such as grandparents would not do as they asked, for example, around naps and snacks, and that it may even cause tension to ask specific things of them while they care for their grandchild.

“With a childminder if there's something you're not happy with, I'm comfortable discussing it without causing any feuds... It's a lot easier to ask them to parent your child in the way that you parent them without them being offended.”

Parent of 3 year old, North Ayrshire, only using a childminder

The parents interviewed clearly trusted their childminders to respond to any requests they made. One view was that parents could not expect the same degree of responsiveness from a nursery worker with more young children under their care.

Overall, this close, yet professional, relationship gave parents peace of mind. They felt they could rely upon and trust their childminder to be there for them, and to care for their child in the way that they are happy with.

c) Frequent contact and communication

Frequent contact and communication played an important role in building the close relationship between parents and childminders. Childminders often used private Facebook Groups or WhatsApp to update parents on what they are doing throughout the day or to discuss practical matters. Parents said they enjoyed regular updates, and said seeing or knowing that their child is safe and well further added to their peace of mind.

“I wouldn't change her [my childminder] at all - I feel I can approach her about anything, I can say 'she's not had a great night, can you keep an eye' – she'll send a message saying she's had a nap and she's fine. I would never get that at nursery.”

Parent of 9 year old and 2 year old, using a childminder, Falkirk

Some childminders emphasised that both the level of observation and detailed information being communicated to parents is more than they believed nurseries would be able to provide:

“I see myself as helping the parents, they're still very much involved in what their child is doing during the day and what preferences they have... I do a daily diary which lets the parents know exactly what

they've been doing during the day. Even going to the toilet. You can see if there's an issue. Nurseries can't put in as much detail."

Childminder for 5 years, Renfrewshire

Parents emphasised the value of the time available to speak to their childminder at drop off and pick up. Childminders felt that before the pandemic, being able to chat inside the home was beneficial for informal catch ups with parents, however, doorstep chats still allowed the time to discuss anything they needed to. Again, this was seen by parents as an advantage over nursery pick up and drop offs, which were described as quicker and not always with the person that has spent the most time with your child that day:

"When I would go and pick him up from nursery whoever I would speak to might not have spent as much time with him that day. I wouldn't get the same kind of information [or] one on one chat."

Parent of 2 year old, Fife

d) Professional knowledge and expertise

The expertise and knowledge of childminders was seen as a major benefit to children and parents. Parents particularly commented on this, in comparison to informal care. Participants spoke of making use of their childminder's experience and knowledge to help them support their child through specific issues or stages. Examples included advice on toilet training, sleep issues, weaning, transitions, challenging behaviour and fussy eating. These types of things were often talked about at drop off and pick ups. Parents appreciated being able to tap into childminders' often extensive knowledge and experience; and childminders spoke of supporting parents with a range of skills and issues, and working with them as part of a team.

"It's like taking her to her granny's who happens to be a Mary Poppins level expert in child development."

Parent of 5 year old, Scottish Borders

"We build a relationship with the parents and work with them, we provide support and advice to new parents... It's team work, we're raising the child together."

Childminder for 18 years, North Lanarkshire

There were also examples of childminders explaining developmental stages to parents, with regard to things like fine motor skills, and how the activities they were doing were helping the child gain skills and understanding appropriate for their stage. Parents interviewed for this study did not always use terms like 'child development' or mention specific areas such as motor skills or vocabulary. However, they nonetheless conveyed their satisfaction with how well their child was 'coming along' and clearly connected this with the quality of the environment their childminder created and the activities they delivered based on their expertise.

e) An extra level of support – going ‘above and beyond’

There was a general sense among parents that childminders are often willing to support families in additional ways, which they would not receive from other formal childcare settings. Examples were given (by parents and childminders) of childminders going above and beyond standard duties to help parents. This could involve taking children to the doctors, or driving their child home if the parent was unable to pick them up. One childminder, before the pandemic, invited parents over to teach them how to cook healthy meals their children had been enjoying. Another, who was delivering Community Childminding, had supported a family in crisis including signposting them to other support services.

“I did have a two year old funded place here, he used to go to a Family Centre, but mum didn't really drive and she struggled to get a car to take him. Whereas I would go and pick him up so that kind of took the stress off the parent.”

Childminder for 18 years, Falkirk

Some participants described difficulties they had gone through as a family (e.g. parents separating, serious illness in the family) and how their childminder had been there for them throughout – to help practically, but also by being sensitive to what is going on, thinking about the child's needs, and providing emotional support to parents.

“They're not just child-led, they're family-led.”

Parent of 12 year old and 5 year old, Scottish Borders

Parents welcomed this extra level of care and support – it took some of the stress of being a parent to a young child away, and was seen as a major selling point to those considering childminding (this is covered in more detail in Chapter 7).

“(I) would say 100% do it [use a childminder] to other parents... It's how much they help you, and how they love and care for them.”

Parent of 9 year old and 3 year old, South Lanarkshire

As such, many participants viewed childminding, not just as a form of childcare, but as a form of family support.

f) Other practical benefits

Parents described several other practical benefits of choosing a childminder over other types of care. These included location – most parents were using childminders that lived fairly close to them, meaning it was convenient to use them and especially handy if they did not have access to a car.

Another benefit for some was the fact that siblings can be together. Some parents mentioned the emotional benefit to the children of this, but there was also a practical benefit of having a single drop off/pick up point.

Views on value for money and cost varied – usually depending on whether parents perceived their childminder to be more or less expensive than a private nursery. Some parents took adult-child ratios into account in assessing value for money: even if a childminder cost the same as a nursery, the lower numbers meant childminding was still viewed as better value by some. Participants who mentioned costs as a benefit tended to mention good value for money, and that the hourly rate was less than nursery. A further benefit mentioned was where parents only pay childminders for hours they need, in contrast with nurseries where parents generally pay for a fixed session, whether they need the full session or not.

Summary of perceived positive outcomes for parents

The following table gives an overview of how some of the key features of childminding are seen to benefit parents. This is based on parents' responses and the related benefits and positive outcomes they mentioned.

Table 4. Summary of perceived outcomes for parents

Outcome → Feature ↓	Less stress / less hassle	Peace of mind / confidence their child is happy, safe, nurtured	Parenting support / emotional support / practical advice	Creating consistent approach in childminder setting & at home	Better able to work / study / get respite
Flexibility of provision	✓				✓
Close, yet professional, relationship between childminders & parents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (particularly respite)
Frequent contact & communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Professional knowledge & expertise of childminders	✓	✓	✓	✓	
An extra level of support – going above & beyond	✓	✓	✓	✓ (particularly emotional support – continuity at difficult times)	✓
Siblings together	✓	✓		✓	✓ (supports work / study if children not spread around different settings – logistics/time etc)
Lower cost for some	✓				✓
Local	✓				✓

Limitations of childminding for parents

As noted in the previous chapter, the parents consulted in this study were generally extremely positive about the impact childminding had, had on them and their families. However, when prompted, they did identify some perceived limitations or downsides for parents when choosing childminding over other types of care. These included:

- A perception that a childminding setting does not provide the same ‘internal quality checks’ that a nursery does as a result of nurseries employing more people, who can act as a check on each other’s standards. This meant parents are putting a lot of trust in one person¹⁷.
- From a practical perspective, using a childminder on a frequent basis means parents are reliant on one person – which can mean they are left without childcare if their childminder is unable to work for any period (although parents also noted that this rarely happened, in their experience).
- A related point was that parents reported having to arrange holidays at the same time as their childminder and having to fit in with their timings if they have other children to pick up and drop off at school. However, again these were not features which caused any major issues for the families we spoke to (as childminders tended to give a good deal of advance notice about holidays).
- While parents were positive about the experience of using a childminder, it was noted that there was high demand for childminding, and that it could be difficult to get a space in the first instance.
- As mentioned above, views of value for money varied. However, those that saw costs as higher (when compared to a private nursery) added that they could still justify it because they felt it was the right setting for their child.
- The pandemic, and the first lockdown in particular, had caused some tension between parents and childminder that requested (full or partial) fees to hold the space.

¹⁷ In this regard, it is worth noting that nurseries are inspected as whole settings whereas, since most childminders work alone, an inspection of a childminding setting is effectively an inspection of the individual childminder.

4. Combining childminding with other forms of childcare

Summary of main findings

- Participants described various patterns of care involving a childminder and other forms of care from a nursery or grandparents.
- There are several reasons why parents choose to combine childminding with other forms of care: to cover all their work or study hours, to try to achieve value for money, and because they want their child to attend a nursery setting before starting school.
- Although there are practical reasons for combining care, parents and childminders also talked about benefits of children experiencing and being comfortable in different settings. Participants did, however, identify some logistical challenges to overcome.
- There was no consensus among childminders on whether funded hours had, had an impact on patterns of care.
- However, there was a view among some childminders that it is not financially viable to provide care for children for a short time before or after nursery, as they count towards the setting's operating ratios. As a result, some childminders have stopped offering wraparound care or asked families to use them for full days only.

Patterns of care

Participants described various patterns of care during a typical week. Some parents used a childminder for all their care and others used a mixture of a childminder and other forms of care from a nursery or grandparents.

There were examples of blended care¹⁸ where a child attends more than one setting for funded ELC hours:

“A parent of a four year old, uses a childminder from 8.00am to 5.30/6.00pm three days a week and nursery two days a week with the childminder also doing drop off and pick up from the nursery.”

As in the example above, some parents described how they use a childminder for wraparound¹⁹ care outside the hours typically offered by a nursery setting. For example, a parent of a four year old described how their child attends nursery until

¹⁸ Throughout this report, when we use the term 'blended care' we mean a combination of funded ELC at different formal providers (e.g. using funded hours at a childminder and a nursery).

¹⁹ We use the term 'wraparound care' to refer to childminders looking after children before and/or after nursery or school which provides parents with a longer day of care. This is typically used when parents are working longer hours than their children are in nursery or school.

12.40pm every day with the childminder collecting the child from there two days a week on the days she is working full time.

There were participants who used a childminder and made use of informal care from grandparents or other relatives. For example, a parent of a one year old and three year old, who used a childminder three days a week and in-laws two days a week.

Reasons for combining childminding with other forms of care

Parents described a number of reasons why they use a childminder in combination with other forms of care.

- A common need is to cover all the primary carer's work or study hours. For example, a parent of four year old, studying full-time, uses a nursery five days a week and a childminder for wraparound care after the nursery sessions. The parent described how the nursery only offered certain hours that do not fit in with her classes.
- Another practical reason is to try to ensure value for money whilst maximising funded hours entitlement. For example, a parent of twin three year olds, who uses a nursery (funded) for three days a week said it was cheaper to use a childminder (unfunded), than a private nursery, for the other two days a week.
- A common perception was that time at a nursery setting is important before a child goes to school to help with their development and transition.

"I do like the idea of him being used to going to that building, you know because it's attached to the school and that's where he's then going to go into school. Kinda think that will hopefully help with his transition. He's obviously meeting a lot of his wee friends that will hopefully go into primary one with him."

Parent of a 3 year old, using childminder and nursery, Falkirk

As such, there are parents who would consider using a blended model in the future because they want their child to experience nursery before they go to school.

"I would consider blended simply because she is in a routine, she likes the childminder, she likes the children that go there, so I would keep her there but probably two days a week but at the nursery three days a week so she gets the educational side."

Parent of a 17 month old, currently using a childminder only, Highland

In this regard, it is worth noting that parents, in particular, and some childminders valued highly the notion of 'school readiness'. However, best practice guidance emphasises the need for schools to be 'child ready': "For children, now is more important than the futures we plan for them. Rigid ideas of 'school readiness' or what

children 'should' be doing, place too much emphasis on the practitioner's concerns about the future (Carlton and Winsler, 1999).²⁰

Benefits of combining childminding with other forms of care

Although there were practical reasons for choosing combinations of care, when asked what their ideal childcare would look like, parents commonly said they were happy with their current arrangement and identified a range of benefits:

- Participants highlighted the benefits of their child experiencing different settings and mixing with different groups of children. For example, a parent of a four year old and a six year old, who uses a nursery and school and childminder for wraparound care, highlighted that the school has children of the same age but that there is a range of ages at the childminder. Similarly, a parent of a four year old and a two year old, who both attend a childminder two days a week, described how the four year old enjoys time away from his sister and making new friends when he goes to nursery one afternoon a week.
- The benefits of experiencing different settings was also specifically mentioned in relation to additional support needs. For example, the parent of a three year old with additional support needs, said their son gets to experience the "best of both worlds" with the home environment at the childminder and a noisier setting at the nursery where they also have access to specialist staff.
- There was a view that, for some children, full days at a nursery setting can be draining so that is balanced by using a childminding setting for part of the week.
- In addition to flexibility and financial benefits for families, it was also mentioned that using a childminder can reduce the burden on grandparents who want to help with childcare.

Childminders described similar benefits to parents of using another form of ELC as well as a childminder. In addition, a participant highlighted how childminders can work together with a nursery to benefit children indicating that, if there was a good relationship with the nursery, they could both support the child if they were struggling with part of their learning.

Disadvantages of combining childminding with other forms of care

Parents highlighted few disadvantages of using more than one setting, for them or for their children.

The most commonly described disadvantage was the logistics involved with getting children to different settings during the week (during the same day or on different days) and the disruption this can cause. However, it was clear that this was less of a disadvantage once a routine had been established.

Childminders identified similar disadvantages of using more than one setting for children as parents did, and in particular, that it can be a challenge to juggle

²⁰ [Realising the Ambition](#), p.15

collecting children from different settings during the day. This could be disruptive for other children in the setting who need to go with the childminder for pick ups and drop offs or get used to children being around at different times. However, as with parents, this was less of an issue as a routine is established.

“[children attending another setting] is not a challenge as long as you're organised, but I have a lot of running around in the morning taking kids to four different schools.”

Childminder for 12 years, Angus

Impact of funded hours on combining childminding with other forms of care

There was no consensus among childminders on whether funded hours had had an impact on patterns of care.

Some childminders thought that it had not had an impact. For example, a childminder of two years, Edinburgh, not delivering funded hours, said she had not seen a difference yet as patterns of combined care were already working well in her area. Another participant, a childminder of 11 years in Aberdeenshire, delivering funded hours, said she had fewer families combining care as parents have chosen to use their full funded hours with her.

However, childminders commonly said they had seen greater use of combined care due to funded hours. For example, a childminder of nine years, in the Scottish Borders (not delivering funded hours) said:

“in the past it was one or the other, but I'm definitely seeing a trend that [parents] use blended [meaning combinations, not necessarily both funded] more often.”

It was mentioned that some childminders feel they have been left with the “dregs” of hours (largely in relation to wraparound care) and that this is having an impact on their business. It can be difficult financially to provide care for children for a short time before or after nursery, as they count towards the setting's operating ratios.

“we are getting left with the last lot of dregs of hours to try and fit in, and then parents obviously don't want to pay or can't afford to pay the difference, so it is not a viable business anymore... a lot of nurseries are saying okay, we will offer you 9am to 3pm, three days a week, four days a week, five days a week, but parents that work full time have to get wraparound. The only option for wraparound care is childminders, but the childminders don't really want wraparound care, there is no money in it.”

Childminder for 14 years, delivering funded hours, Falkirk

As a result of these challenges some childminders said they have asked parents to use their service for a full days only or have stopped offering wraparound care.

5. Impact of the pandemic (on childminders and families)

Summary of main findings

OVERALL IMPACT ON CHILDMINDERS

- Childminders described experiencing a significant decrease in income, with many services having to close or reduce numbers in the first lockdown. Further impacts mentioned were additional work created (e.g. extra cleaning, new policies, procedures, risk assessments) and high levels of stress and concern for a range of reasons, including the health and wellbeing of their own families.
- Views among childminders on how the pandemic had affected future plans ranged from it having little impact at all, to those that were considering retirement after the stress of the last year. Others were reflecting on whether they would like to work part time or take a temporary break from childminding.
- Childminders' decisions around whether to partner with their local authority for funded ELC were not shaped by the impact of the pandemic.

IMPACT ON ABILITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN

- There was concern among childminders about the disruption to children's continuity of care during the pandemic. They described children who had lost confidence and were nervous to come back to the setting after being at home with their parents for so long.
- Being away from their childminder was also seen as negatively affecting children's learning and development, although there was also a view among childminders that these impacts were temporary.
- Both childminders and parents mentioned that the pandemic restricted the range of activities childminders could do out in the community (such as playgroups or soft play).
- However, childminders did make the point that the pandemic had led them to do more outdoor activities in nature with the children, for example going to the park or woods. Some said they intended to continue this once restrictions are lifted.
- Some stayed in touch with children during lockdown through phone calls or video calls. In order to continue to support children's learning, some childminders created resource packs or even ran small events online that children could engage with at home.
- Parents being unable to enter and spend time in the childminder's home was seen by some childminders as having a negative impact on their ability to support parents and build a close trusting relationship, particularly if they were new to the service. Parents did not tend to comment on this as much as childminders, suggesting they were still reasonably happy with the level of contact and communication.

Overall impact of the pandemic on childminders

A decrease in income as a result of the pandemic was a common experience among the childminders who took part in the study. Some childminders had seen a reduction in the number of children they cared for during the first lockdown, while others had temporarily closed. Childminders explained that there were families who made a sudden decision to keep their children at home when Scotland was in lockdown, because they were worried about money and/or the health risks of mixing with other households. There was a view that parents who were on furlough or working from home were more able to care for their children at home, which contributed to this too. At the same time as losing clients, childminders reported fewer new enquiries coming in.

“It reduced my income massively, but it's come back up now.” –
Childminder for 8 years, Highland

Childminders who struggled financially due to the pandemic described finding this period stressful and difficult; even “devastating”. One childminder explained that the financial loss she experienced meant her family had to use savings they had been planning to use to build a conservatory for additional space to cover day to day expenses.

Childminders also highlighted the difficulty of having to take on additional work in order to continue delivering their services, such as extra cleaning, having to buy more cleaning materials and sanitizer, updating policies and risk assessments, and informing parents of changes.

“It was very stressful for me – extra cleaning and extra paperwork – I made sure everyone [parents/carers] had read the COVID-19 information properly before signing”

Childminder for 18 years, South Lanarkshire

Childminders also worried about protecting the health of their own family given the service is provided in their own home.

“[Working at] a nursery, it's all there and then you come home. But it's in my home. Eleven families in a week. Initially it was a worry. I haven't had my own parents here for over a year.”

Childminder for 10 years, Aberdeenshire

While the childminders interviewed did not report any negative experiences with charging retainer fees, there were parents who cited this as a cause of tension between them and their childminder. For example, one parent felt it was unfair that she was charged the full amount of childminding fees when she was furloughed and on universal credit and looking after her daughter at home.

Not all childminders in the study were affected negatively by the pandemic with some saying they felt quite lucky compared to other childminders they knew.

Childminders that were delivering ELC funded hours did not say that the pandemic had affected their ability to do so. Childminders also did not report that their decisions around whether to partner with their local authority for funded ELC had been shaped by the impact of the pandemic.

The impact on childminders' ability to support children

When it came to childminders' ability to support children, the lockdown presented a variety of challenges.

a) Disruption

There was concern among childminders about the disruption to children's continuity of care during the pandemic. Childminders described children who had lost confidence and were nervous to come back to the setting after being at home with their parents for so long.

“[One child] didn't come for a while, so coming back was a bit of a shock. [...] She was teary when coming in, she'd built that bond again with Mum, made the transition a bit harder.”

Childminder for 18 years, Stirling

Being away from their childminder was also seen as negatively impacting on children's learning and development, although there was also a view that these impacts were temporary, and that “young children can bounce back”.

However, one childminder that provided care for a boy with complex additional support needs emphasised the more severe impacts on his development of having to shield and stay at home. This was exacerbated by the fact that the pandemic meant additional support services, such as his speech and language therapy, were also disrupted or unavailable.

One childminder mentioned that the first lockdown meant some children missed out on the school transition work she had planned to support them before they started school.

Some childminders felt they had managed to mitigate the negative impacts of this disruption by staying in touch with children through phone calls or video calls. In order to continue to support children's learning, some childminders created resource packs or even ran small events online that children could engage with at home.

“We had online reading groups so children could see each other. I brought families together.”

Childminder for 13 years, Aberdeenshire

b) Children's mental health

Managing the emotional impact of the pandemic and of the lockdowns on children was another difficulty mentioned by childminders.

While the perceived impact of the pandemic on children's wellbeing varied, childminders were aware that some children were picking up on anxiety at home and in the setting.

"He's very aware that his parents are both key workers and very aware of the coronavirus and constantly washing his hands and getting anxious about dad being at work. It has a negative impact on him, and his anxiety levels needed management"

Childminder for 3 years, Midlothian

Childminders felt the introduction of new rules and routines in the pandemic could be distressing for some children, for example getting used to facemasks, extra handwashing and not being allowed to bring toys from home.

"You don't wanna scare kids and you don't want to be seen to be cleaning everything. I'll wipe their hands. You don't want to get kids to think they've got to constantly clean their hands because I think mentally it could become an issue later on."

Childminder for 18 years, Stirling

c) Activities

Both childminders and parents mentioned that the pandemic restricted the range of activities childminders could do out in the community (such as playgroups or soft play), limiting children's opportunities to learn and to socialise.

"We've not been to the village coffee morning where they'd mix with the older folks – so there's been less chance to work on social skills."

Childminder for 18 years, Aberdeenshire

Parents' views on this tended to be that although not ideal, they were glad their children were not at home full time during the restrictions.

Childminders did make the point that the pandemic had caused them to do more outdoor activities in nature with the children, for example going to the park or the woods, which was seen as beneficial. Some said they intended to continue with this once restrictions are lifted. One said a positive impact of the pandemic was that it sped up her plans to improve her outside facilities.

"Another benefit is that it's forced us to slow down a little bit. We were quite busy before, we did a library club, a toddler's club... what we've done in place of that is go outside throughout Autumn and Winter mostly every day. It has helped in terms of nurturing them giving them that outdoors experience and I've benefitted from that in a mental health capacity."

Childminder for 5 years, Glasgow

Due to the pandemic, childminders described having to limit the toys children could play with so that they could be cleaned more easily, for example not using soft toys and rotating which toys are out on different days. This was seen as a particular disadvantage for young children or babies, who learn a lot from touching.

“You can’t use alcoholic sanitiser on a baby. You really don’t want them touching, little ones are teething as well, but they learn from touching.”

Childminder for 5 years, Renfrewshire

However, not all childminders saw fewer toys as a negative because it enabled children to play in new and different ways, and they were still very happy in the setting. One also suggested that childminders are better placed than nurseries to manage infection control because of the smaller setting and fewer toys.

The impact on childminders’ ability to support parents and families

a) Doorstop drop off and pick ups

Parents being unable to enter and spend time in the childminder’s home was seen by childminders as having a negative impact on their ability to support parents and build a close trusting relationship, particularly if they were new to the service:

“No parental visits is a huge disadvantage.”

Childminder for 20 years, Renfrewshire

“Our entire service has changed. The hardest thing is the social distancing between the adults.”

Childminder for 11 years, Aberdeenshire

Other childminders felt less strongly about this and one even said they preferred the quicker drop off in the mornings as it can get very busy. Parents did not tend to comment on this as much as childminders, suggesting they were still reasonably happy with the level of contact and communication (although many were just very grateful to have childcare after having none).

b) The need for extra support

Childminders were very aware of how the pandemic had affected the families they work with. They described a range of stressful experiences that some parents had been through including redundancy, furlough, home schooling older children, health worries, needing to isolate, and relationships with partners ending. In addition, they were aware of the general stress and anxiety caused by the lockdowns and the pandemic and saw themselves as having a role in helping parents cope – practically and emotionally. While childminders spoke of their own stress during the pandemic, they still spoke of parents’ and children’s needs sensitively and often explained what they had done to meet those needs where possible.

c) Flexibility and going the extra mile

Following on from the previous point, childminders talked about how hard they worked to support families' new needs and routines that were a result of the pandemic. Examples given were running online reading groups, staying in touch with children via video calls, and once open again, offering different hours that suited some parents better. One parent's account of how the pandemic affected their childcare arrangement demonstrates how much of a support their childminder was, particularly given her child had complex additional support needs:

"We started isolating a week before everybody else. We got really jumpy. We took James out of school a week early. Sarah started looking after him in her own home. Her husband started working from home early doors. So there wasn't that risk there and we formed a bubble.

We stopped for a while when schools were closed again because James needs to be one-on-one, and Sarah can't do that if she needs to home-school her own children. But she continued to be a source of support and help. She did grocery shopping for us, took James for a walk or read him a story in garden..."

Parent of 8 year old and 4 year old with additional support needs,
Midlothian

d) Communications

As well as usual video calls to keep in touch when their services were shut, childminders made more use of apps like WhatsApp once they were able to open again. While some childminders were doing this already, some said they did it more once parents could not come inside and some found it especially helpful for new clients:

"I think the new wee one- that's going to be a different way of managing it. I've said I'll take little videos, so that she can see her wee one in the setting... There are uncertainties but I think with childminding there's always a way to get around it."

Childminder for 20 years, Renfrewshire

The impact of the pandemic on childminders' future plans

Even though participants spoke of how difficult things have been since March 2020, there was a sense that overall, for them, the numbers of children were getting back to normal and that many were happy to continue to work with children and families. When asked whether the pandemic had shaped their plans for the future, views ranged from it having little impact at all to those that were considering retirement after the stress of the last year.

"Don't think it has affected me, still have the same children. Doing what I've always done. I love my job, love working with kids."

Childminder for 30 years, Edinburgh

“I’m exhausted – I may cut back my hours. I’m 56 and not getting any younger.”

Childminder for 9 years, Highland

Others spoke about how the pandemic made them reflect on whether they would like to work part time or reduce the number of children they provide care for. Or considering a break, but feeling a duty to be there for their families:

“I’m busier than I’ve ever been. I might slow down a bit. I feel like I could do with a break. But they need you. That’s the bottom line.”

Childminder for 18 years, Stirling

Those that were the most concerned about transmission of the virus to them / their family said they had been either put off blended care, only wanted to do full days, or definitely no longer wanted to provide any form of blended care as it felt too risky.

The impact of the pandemic on parents’ perceptions of childminding

The pandemic made parents even more appreciative of childminders, particularly as many nurseries and out of school settings (for school age childcare) closed when Level 4 restrictions were in place (December 2020 to March 2021) when most childminders were able to continue to open.

“It made me feel a bit less guilty. Sometimes I would get that mum guilt when I had to go to work and leave him. But it made me realise how much he needs it. Mixing with other kids etc.”

Parent of 2 year old, only using childminder, Fife

One parent was especially grateful because she had been ill for months with long Covid. This meant her children missed out on time with her and had a lot of screen time. Once her daughter could go back to the childminder, she really appreciated the emotional support for her as a single mum, as well as the benefits to her child. Feelings of gratitude and satisfaction were also held by parents that had only started to use a childminding services since the first lockdown in March 2020:

“[I] just had a gut feeling it would work – because he had spent so much time in the house. Spent a lot of time at home during lockdown so I thought a home environment would be better... If had gone to a new nursery in August 2020, we would just have had to hand over and no settling in time [because of restrictions]”

Parent of 9 and 2 year olds, Falkirk

Safety concerns meant some parents used their childminder more and did not use nursery because they felt it was too risky in terms of increasing the chance of catching coronavirus.

"Since all schools are back, she helps full time. Even though restrictions are lifting we still feel he shouldn't be in that setting [the nursery]."

Parent of 8 year old and 4 year old with additional support needs, Midlothian

Overall, parents spoke positively about their childminders in relation to how things worked during the pandemic. Whether they had started using a service before or after March 2020, parents said they planned to continue to do so.

6. Perceptions of funded ELC

Summary of main findings

- Some parents could not use their funded hours of ELC with their childminder because their childminder does not deliver funded hours. Some participants did not have a problem with this whilst others would like to be able to use funded hours with their childminder.
- Parents using their funded hours with a childminder were happy to be able to do so. They described benefits of cost savings and being able to choose the childcare that best suited them and their child.
- Participants commented, however, that there is a lack of awareness and clarity amongst parents about funded hours in relation to childminding.
- There were mixed views amongst childminders about the impact that childminders providing funded hours would have on child outcomes. Some participants felt children would benefit from childminder requirements to meet the National Standard, whereas others felt they were already meeting the National Standard without being a partner provider.
- Childminders currently delivering funded hours described practical impacts on their service such as increased paperwork and training. Some commented that they are providing care for children they would not have otherwise because parents could not afford a childminder without funded hours.
- Childminders who are not delivering funded hours did not suggest they are struggling to fill places.
- There were mixed views about the future impact of the full expansion to 1,140 hours on childminders, in terms of service provision and childminders' finances.

Parent perceptions

There were practical reasons why some parents did not use funded hours of ELC with a childminder, often because their childminder is not offering funded hours. For some participants this was not a problem as they were happy for all their funded hours to be at nursery.

“I don't think it would make any difference [if the childminder offered funded hours] as she's in her preschool year and I'm keen for her to be in nursery as much as possible.”

Parent of a 4 year old, using childminder and nursery, Fife

Other parents would like to be able to use funded hours with their childminder and were looking into whether it will be possible in the future when their child is eligible for funded hours or if their childminder becomes an approved provider.

In other cases, parents did not use funded hours with their childminder because they already use their full entitlement at another setting. For example, a single parent of twin three year olds, working full time, used nursery three days a week for all their funded hours and a childminder (unfunded) for the other two days. The parent would ideally like to have funding for the childminder too (see Chapter 4).

Parents were asked if being able to use funded hours with a childminder influenced their decision to use them. Participants who agreed described positive impacts for them and for children. For the reasons described below parents who used funded hours with a childminder said they would recommend it.

Financial savings were highlighted:

- A parent of a one year old and three year old in Aberdeenshire, who uses a childminder (funded) and informal care said 1,140 hours halved their childcare bill
- A parent of a five year old, Scottish Borders, said they would not be able to afford a childminder without funded hours

Parents were happy to have the choice to use funded hours with a childminder. They valued being able to continue an existing relationship with the childminder:

“As soon as we found out that we could use it on a childminder we were really pleased it meant we could continue using her and have that one-on-one. We trust her and [son] already had that relationship.”

Parent of a 4 year old with additional support needs

“I think what’s been really nice though is to have that option...otherwise I would have had to consider do I change and because of funded hours it would just make sense to change to put my son into nursery earlier.”

Parent of a 4 year old, Dumfries and Galloway

This parent also described how funded hours had changed her idea of childcare:

“[the childminder] actually challenged the notion as well, she was like, “ you know you don’t have to send your child to nursery”... we just thought that’s what you had to do. We were really happy when she was like, “you know you don’t have to, you know they can stay with a childminder until school” and we were delighted really... it meant less chopping and changing for him.”

As this quote touches on, however, there is a lack of awareness and clarity about funded hours among parents.

“I find the whole thing around funded hours really quite complicated and I probably don’t really fully understand if I’m fully honest.”

Parent of 3 and 5 year olds, using childminder (not funded), nursery (funded) and informal care, Falkirk

Parents participating in the study suggested that other parents were also unaware of being able to use funded hours with a childminder. This is discussed further in Chapter 7 on the promotion of childminding.

Childminder perceptions

Childminders were also asked about the benefits of childminder funded hours for children and for parents. There were mixed views about outcomes for children. Some participants described the potential for positive impacts.

“In the next town to us is a childminder that I see quite a lot of and she offers funded childcare and I don't. The things that we do on a daily basis are pretty much mirrored, we do similar things in different places, but the children are getting the same outcomes whether they are funded or not.”

Childminder for 9 years, Scottish Borders, not delivering funded hours

“Initially when I was about to start I thought it was going to be a lot more work having funded children and everything, but a lot of stuff that we do with the funded children we would be doing anyway because we did always follow the Curriculum for Excellence type things to make sure they were reaching all their different development milestones so I don't feel as if its changed us that much with what we're providing for the children.”

Childminder for 7 years, Fife, delivering funded hours

Some childminders, on the other hand, think funding hours will make a difference.

“I think it does [make a difference] in lots of ways because there's more accountability... It forces our hands a little bit to make sure we're fulfilling [national standards].”

Childminder for 5 years, Glasgow, delivering funded hours

A childminder of nine years in Highland, not delivering funded hours, commented that more children will benefit from childminding if it is more accessible.

Both childminders delivering funded hours and those who are not also highlighted how funding saves families money and gives them the choice to make the best childcare decision for them, including to continue using a childminder, as discussed above.

However, there were also views among parents that they were not benefitting financially as much as they would have hoped because they are not able to use their funded hours exactly how they would like or still have to pay for wraparound hours. This may point to issues around local implementation.

a) Impact on their service

Childminders delivering funded hours highlighted some impacts on their professional life.

“[funded hours] provides a security that I need to give me the confidence to invest in this as a business and know that it will remain viable, and long-term to know that these placements are there and available and that’ll be working with the same nursery team to build that relationship with as well as the parents and the council representative.”

Childminder for 3 years, Midlothian

“[It’s had a] Big impact emotionally in terms of being recognised as a fellow professional. I’m a professional early years provider on the same level as others.”

Childminder for 5 years, Glasgow

Childminders also identified practical impacts. Participants mentioned increased paperwork and training but also more support from their local authority, to go through the training process and particularly during the pandemic. It was suggested that this support makes childminding more attractive to parents.

There were mixed views on the financial impact of funded hours on childminding businesses. A childminder of 12 years in Angus said partnership with the council meant a cut to their earnings because the funding does not cover the full costs of meals and outings and cannot choose what to charge whereas a childminder of five years in Glasgow said they are now being paid more for delivering funded hours.

Some participants said they are now providing childcare for children they might not have had otherwise. For example, a childminder of seven years in Fife said they have children they know they would not have without funded hours because the parents are not working and could not afford the care otherwise. That being said, participants who were not delivering funded hours did not suggest they were struggling to fill places. There might have been an assumption that they would be if families were choosing providers who offered funded hours instead. A childminder of nine years in Scottish Borders said funded hours has had little impact on demand as they are the only childminder in the area.

There were also mixed views about the future impact of the expansion of funded hours on childminders’ businesses and childminding in general. A childminder of 18 years in Falkirk, delivering funded hours, hopes that the expansion will mean more work for them. Whereas a childminder of 12 years in West Lothian, not currently delivering funded hours, thought that the expansion to 1,140 hours will put a lot of childminders out of business because nurseries will increase their capacity.

“I think what I’ll see is I’m having the younger children rather than the nursery aged children. Until I was funded they would have taken option of nursery. If the parents don’t realise that I have the same qualifications, they may not think of me as option.”

Childminder for 10 years, Aberdeenshire, delivering funded hours

“I think there will be a difficulty [with 1,140 hours] because it’s going to have a financial impact on a lot of childminders because they can’t charge for the hours in nursery if you’re a funded provider. Plus there’s a lot more paperwork involved, depends on your local authority, but some are stipulating that you must provide a hot cooked lunch and that may or may not suit childminders. A lot of negative impacts.”

Childminder for 20 years, Renfrewshire

There was a view that the true impact of the funded ELC is not yet known as expanded hours have not been fully rolled out and because the funded children currently with childminders are often those who were already in the service before they were eligible.

7. Raising awareness of childminding

Summary of main findings

- There was a consensus among childminders and parents that there was a lack of awareness of childminding as an option and of what childminders can offer – and therefore a need for greater promotion of it. There was a feeling that national and local government have focused more on nursery provision.
- There was a perception among childminders that parents who did not use childminders thought they were “like babysitters” or that the children are “just sitting watching TV”. A lack of knowledge about the training, qualifications and experience of many childminders, and the regulations they must adhere to, was thought to be at the root of these misconceptions.
- The perceived benefits of childminding set out in chapters 2 and 3 should be the starting point for promotion. From the point of view of parents, the main selling points are the flexible hours, the one-to-one attention and the nurturing, home-from-home setting. Childminders were keen to promote the developmental aspects (including their training and qualifications, the development plans they produce and the records they keep) and the regulations, risk assessments and quality assurance mechanisms that apply to them as well as to nurseries.
- Childminders and parents thought awareness of childminding should be raised, and misconceptions about it addressed, by the Scottish Government (on television and through social media), by local authorities (on their websites) and by health visitors (when meeting parents).
- When asked what might encourage a greater uptake of childminding, parents tended to suggest more funding (including extending funded hours to younger children) and greater clarity about what funding/financial assistance is already available (including information on tax free childcare, tax credits for childcare and universal credit for childcare).
- The need for more childminders to address the difficulty of finding a childminding place was raised by parents.
- The parent of a child with additional needs raised the issue of increasing the support provided to childminders, to expand their capacity to work with these children, as well as signposting to suitably experienced childminders.
- A parent from Africa highlighted the need to raise awareness of childminding and make information accessible to ethnic minority groups and people who do not speak English. It may be that the personal support that childminders could offer parents (for example, about how to negotiate the various early years systems and what local amenities and activities are available) would particularly appeal to, and be beneficial to, those who are new to Scotland.

This section discusses parents and childminders views on how childminding might best be promoted to parents, and draws on their perspectives to make recommendations. It is based on the interviews with childminders and with parents who currently use childminders. As noted in the Methods section above, this research did not include parents who do not use childminders and, as the target audience, it would be worth conducting additional research with them during the development of promotional materials.

The need to promote childminding

There was a consensus among parents and childminders that there should be greater promotion of childminding. It was agreed that there is:

- **A lack of awareness of childminding as an option at all.** Some of the parents in the study had explored childminding options because they had friends or family members who recommended it or they were aware of local childminders. However, others had not considered it all (tending to assume that their child would go to nursery) until a chance mention from someone. One parent described how she had posted on a local Facebook page asking for nursery recommendations, when someone asked if she had considered a childminder – “I never had. I don’t know why” – and a local childminder proactively got in touch.
- **A lack of awareness of what childminders can offer.**

There was a feeling among childminders that the Scottish Government and local authorities have focused much more on nursery provision.

“It’s been “nursery, nursery, nursery”.”

Childminder for 2.5 years, Edinburgh

“The Government don’t see us. We’re trying to promote ourselves but it’s quite deflating, knowing that we’re not getting recognised.”

Childminder for 18 years, North Lanarkshire

However, there were some indications of more recent progress, including from those who had been in the sector for many years:

“Since I started 10 years ago, SCMA and people at the council have fought a lot for us.”

Childminder for 10 years, Aberdeenshire

“I see us moving forward now.”

Childminder for 30 years, Edinburgh

Common misconceptions about childminding

Parents and childminders identified a number of possible misconceptions that they thought should be addressed. The most commonly mentioned were:

- That a childminder is (merely) “like a babysitter”
- That the children are “just sitting watching TV”
- That childminders “just sit and play” with the children.

It was felt that a lack of knowledge about the training, qualifications and experience of many childminders, and the regulations they must adhere to, was at the root of these misconceptions. The above quote may also indicate a lack of awareness about the important role of play in learning.

“It’s not well known how much training and knowledge childminders have to have. They’re just seen as a babysitting service. There needs to be a greater awareness they are qualified. They don’t just sit with them until you pick them up. They do a lot of learning and have skills that are beneficial for kids.”

Parent of 3 year old and 5 year old, Falkirk, using childminder, nursery and informal care from a grandparent

Parents commonly talked about their own misconceptions and things they had not realised that childminders could do until they had looked into it and had one themselves.

“I think there is that old stereotype isn’t there, it is like a dusty old woman looking after your kids in her own home [...] and it wasn’t until I went to [childminder’s], I actually thought, well hang on a minute, it’s totally different. It is actually structured, there is routine, and the kids are fed three times a day and snacks and all this kind of stuff, it was a lot more organised than I expected it to be [...] I didn’t know that they had to have all these certificates and training and things [...] So, I was not aware of it, there was that kind of stringent checks and procedures in place for a childminder, I thought it was a much more informal setting than a nursery.”

Parent of a 1 year old and a 3 year old, Aberdeenshire, using a childminder and informal care from grandparents

Other misconceptions mentioned by parents were that:

- childminders are more expensive than they actually are: “people say, ‘how can you afford that?’”
- that childminders are just for babies and very young children – people do not realise they provide care for children up until they go to school (and, often, beyond that).

There was a view that the term ‘childminding’ itself may be problematic as ‘minding’ conveys something less involved – something akin to just keeping an eye out to check that a child is safe.

“I don’t know if we should be called childminders anymore. I don’t think people realise we’ve got the same qualifications as a nursery worker. Maybe we could be ‘early years practitioners’.”

Childminder for 26 years, Aberdeenshire

What aspects of childminding should be promoted?

Chapters 2 and 3 of this report set out the perceived benefits of childminding and these should be the starting point for promotion. From the point of view of parents, the main selling points are the flexible hours, the one-to-one attention and the nurturing, home-from-home setting. A further aspect that some felt should be promoted was the fact that some childminders provide funded hours and some can provide as much as 1,140 funded hours.

Childminders were keen to promote the developmental aspects (including their training and qualifications, the development plans they produce and the records they keep) and the regulations, risk assessments and quality assurance mechanisms that apply to them as well as to nurseries. Given that all providers involved in the delivery of funded hours are required to follow the same standards, this should also be included within promotion so that parents are aware all providers (including nurseries and childminders) are required to meet the same standards.

It should be borne in mind that there may be a tension between promoting the homely setting and promoting the professionalism of childminders (the latter may be counteracted by the former). This may be mitigated by being careful to promote both aspects at the same time and should be tested with parents.

Where and how childminding should be promoted

Participants suggested that childminding should be promoted by the Scottish Government (on television and through social media), by local authorities (on their websites) and by health visitors (when meeting parents). One specific recommendation was to advertise the fact that a list of local childminders and their inspection reports can be searched for on the Care Inspectorate’s website²¹.

Testimonies from parents could also be used when promoting childminding. When asked what they would say to other parents considering it as an option, responses included:

“100% do it. The main selling points are how personal it can be, how much they help you, they love and care for them, one sole carer, it’s the best thing for children who want routine.”

Parent of 3 year old, using childminder, South Lanarkshire

²¹ [Care Inspectorate website](#)

“I would say definitely go for it but do your research first [...] I’d highly recommend it if you find someone that you click with.”

Parent of 2 year old, using childminder, Falkirk

What parents say would encourage greater uptake

When asked what might encourage a greater uptake of childminding, parents tended to suggest more funding (including extending funded hours to younger children) and – just as importantly – greater clarity about what funding/financial assistance is already available (including information on tax free childcare, tax credits for childcare and universal credit for childcare).

Trust was an underlying theme and a concern for parents when considering childminding as an option – and they recognised it as a potential issue for other parents that might inhibit uptake. Promotion of the regulations and quality assurance mechanisms (discussed above) may help address this. The following comment also raises the question of whether funded trials with childminders might be worth considering.

“Childminders don’t have time for trials²². Some people don’t trust what childminders do. There’s a portal where you can write about childminders but not all parents know about it.”

Parent of 4 year old, using childminder, Fife

The need for more childminders to address the difficulty of finding a place was also raised by both parents and childminders.

The parent of a child with additional needs raised the issue of increasing the support provided to childminders, to expand their capacity to work with these children, as well as signposting to suitably experienced childminders:

“Support childminders with links to training, equipment and have community teams supporting them. They [community teams] are good at going into schools but do they provide the same support to childminders? Could give them work experience in an additional needs school. There should be a directory of childminders with ASN training. [At the moment] you need to find a CM then ask the question. That’s a daunting task for a family that already has a lot on their plate. It’s very word of mouth. We were lucky. Information should be easily and readily available for somebody who needs a specific childminder. I’m not sure who it should be filtered through.... community nurses? They can help signpost where to go to get information. They come to you as soon as you bring baby home from hospital. [...] Otherwise you just wouldn’t know where to start.”

Parent of 4 year old with additional support needs,
using childminder, Midlothian

²² Although this participant’s childminder did not offer trials, some childminders do.

A parent from Africa highlighted the need to raise awareness of childminding and make information accessible to ethnic minority groups and people who do not speak English:

“[Promote childminding through] health visitors, the council website - be clear about how much it costs [she found that confusing]. I think the government should reach out to ethnic minority groups and those that can't speak English. Refugees might not be aware of [childminding]. I think there is a language and cultural barrier. Make this service accessible to everybody.”

Parent of a 1 year old and a newborn, using a childminder, Edinburgh

It may be that the personal support that childminders could offer parents (for example, about how to negotiate the various early years systems and what local amenities and activities are available) would particularly appeal to, and be beneficial to, those who are new to Scotland.

8. Conclusions

Parents who use childminders, and childminders themselves, have the same clear view of what good quality childminding looks like and on the features of childminding that a) support positive outcomes for children and b) support parents and families.

Benefits for children

Features that are perceived to benefit children include the **homely setting** where children feel comfortable and secure – which in turn supports their learning and development; the **low numbers of children to care-givers** which enables the childminder to provide more one-to-one, personalised care to each child and be more child-led and flexible, as well as providing a quieter and potentially less overwhelming environment than a nursery; and **the mix of ages of children** which supports learning and development as younger and older children learn from each other. The small numbers and continuity of care lead to **very close relationships** between children and childminders, which was often perceived as providing children with more comfort, affection and nurturing than they might receive in a nursery. The **professional approach, expertise and qualifications** of childminders, and the range of activities they provided, were linked by participants to better learning and development outcomes than might typically be achieved through informal care from grandparents or other relatives.

Benefits for parents and families

Parents' primary concern is the wellbeing of their children, so the benefits for children listed above were seen by parents as the main benefits of childminding.

In addition, there are a number of features of childminding that are perceived to be beneficial for parents and families. **Flexibility** (in terms of the hours offered, whether that was early starts, late finishes, weekend care, or ad hoc and last minute arrangements) was seen as a key benefit by parents and often drove their decision to use a childminder. Childminders' ability to provide a flexible service gave parents peace of mind – there is room for last minute changes and if something comes up a childminder will usually be able to accommodate that.

Parents also hugely valued the **frequent contact and communication** and chats at drop off/pick up time, which built a **close yet professional relationship** with their childminder. The closeness and trust meant parents could open up about parenting problems and seek advice and support and draw on their childminder's professional knowledge and expertise. At the same time, the professional aspect of the relationship meant parents were comfortable being clear about their childcare requirements and this was contrasted with informal care from family members.

Parents also appreciated that childminders would often go **'above and beyond'** what might be expected to provide families with an extra level of both practical and emotional support both when unexpected problems arose on a day (e.g. driving a child home if the parent could not make the pick up) or more longer-term support when families were going through difficulties (e.g. illness or separation). As such,

childminding was viewed not just as a form of childcare, but also as a **form of family support**. Other practical benefits for parents include the fact that childminders are usually **very local** to them, and that siblings can be cared for together.

Combining childminding with other forms of care

Although there often were practical reasons for choosing combinations of care (e.g. childminding plus nursery, or childminding plus informal care) – a common reason was to cover all the primary carer’s work or study hours – when asked what their ideal childcare would look like, parents who were combining different settings commonly said they were happy with their current arrangement and saw it as ‘the best of both worlds’. They felt their child was benefiting from experiencing different settings and activities and mixing with different groups of children. Further reasons to combine different types of childcare given included avoiding full days or weeks at a nursery as they can be draining (and a childminding setting provides more ‘down time’ for a child); and it can help reduce the burden on grandparents who want to help with childcare.

The impact of the pandemic

While COVID-19 has had huge ramifications for childminders and families across Scotland, participants felt that a degree of normality had returned. Childminders experienced a range of very difficult challenges from March 2020 onwards, particularly because of the financial impact of restrictions in the first lockdown.

Childminders responded to these challenges by finding different ways to keep in touch with children, and once open again, by making more use of the outdoors and adjusting activities to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus. They also thought of ways to support children through the disruption and stress they were experiencing. Parents said the pandemic made them even more grateful for their childminders. Some highlighted the major role their childminder played in supporting their family through very stressful times.

Overall, childminders’ thoughts on their plans after the pandemic were mixed – ranging from being keen to reduce their hours, take a break or possibly retire – to those that are happy to be running their service again with no intention of cutting back their hours. Childminders did not feel that the pandemic had affected their ability to provide ELC funded hours, nor did it effect their decisions around whether to deliver ELC.

Encouraging uptake of childminding

An increase in the uptake of childminding would support delivery of the planned expansion of ELC to 1,140 hours. Childminders and parents agreed that there was a lack of awareness of childminding as an option and of what childminders can offer – and therefore a need for greater promotion of it.

The perceived benefits of childminding set out above should be the starting point for promotion. From the point of view of parents, the main selling points are the **flexible hours, the one-to-one attention and the nurturing, home-from-home setting**.

There are also some misconceptions to be tackled. There was a perception that parents who did not use childminders thought they were “like babysitters” or that the children are “just sitting watching TV”. A lack of knowledge about the training, qualifications and experience of many childminders, and the regulations they must adhere to, was thought to be at the root of these misconceptions. The child development aspects of childminding (including childminders’ training and qualifications, the development plans they produce and the records they keep) and the regulations, risk assessments and quality assurance mechanisms that apply to them as well as to nurseries.

When asked what might encourage a greater uptake of childminding, parents tended to suggest:

- More funding (including extending funded hours to younger children)
- Greater clarity about what funding/financial assistance is already available (including information on tax free childcare, tax credits for childcare and universal credit for childcare)
- More publicity / profile raising – so that parents and carers have heard of childminding as an option, and understand what it is and what it offers

Further research

One of the limitations of this research project was that it only included parents who are already using childminders. Exploring the perceptions of parents who are not using childminders, and may never have considered using a childminder, would be valuable in identifying further ways to promote childminding and to test and develop promotional materials.

Appendix 1 – Discussion Guides

A. Discussion Guide for Childminders

INTRODUCTION

- Introduce self and Ipsos MORI
- Remind them of the purpose of the research: looking at the benefits of childminding for children and their families
- Explain that the interview will last 45 mins to 1 hour and we will give participant £30 as a thank you for taking part.
- Provide reassurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Explain that no identifying information about individuals will be used in the reporting of the research.
- Explain that participation in the research is entirely voluntary, they don't have to answer any questions they are uncomfortable with.
- Request permission to record interview [ask permission then ask them to confirm that once the recording has started]

BACKGROUND

How long have you been a childminder?

Why did you want to become a childminder – what appealed to you about it?

Had you worked in childcare before? [useful to know when asking about comparisons with other settings]

Just to confirm, are you delivering any ELC funded hours?

And are you part of a Community Childminding Service?

Do you have any assistants working with you?

CURRENT PROVISION

Could you tell me about the children you're currently looking after?

Are any of the children from the same family?

IF DELIVERING FUNDED ELC:

- How many children are you providing funded hours for?
- Which children are those?
- Are any age 2?

FOR EACH ASK:

- How long have you been looking after him/her?
- Have the hours always been funded?
- What hours do you look after him/her?
- Do the hours vary?
- Does he/she receive any other formal or informal care?

Are you looking after any pre-school children with additional support needs? (diagnosed or not)

How has the number of children you look after changed since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Benefits for children

What would you say are the **main benefits for children** of being looked after by a childminder? We're particularly interested in the benefits for 3 and 4 year olds, and eligible 2 year olds, who are entitled to funded hours rather than for younger or older children.

FOR EACH BENEFIT MENTIONED PROBE, IF NECESSARY ON:

- What is it about the childminding environment in particular that supports that?
- Can you give an example?
- Clarify if the benefit is in contrast to nursery and/or other care

Are there any other particular benefits compared to a nursery setting?

Are there any other particular benefits compared with informal care from grandparents or other relatives?

PROMPT IF NOT MENTIONED- Are there any benefits in relation to:

- The home environment?
- The number or mix of other children?
- The continuity of care (being cared for by same childminder for years)?
- Blended care with other provision
- Support for transitions to group settings
- Children's learning and development? Which aspects?
- Social skills?
- Behaviour?
- The different activities you do?

Are there types of children it works particularly well for?

PROMPTS: age, personality/temperament, particular needs

How do you think the benefits of childminding could be maximised?

PROBE:

- For children and their outcomes?
- More broadly?

[if struggling to answer – try: what needs to be in place so that children get the most out of being in a CM setting?]

And are there types of children that it works less well for – who might do better with another form of care?

PROMPTS: age, personality/temperament, particular needs

And more generally, what would you say are the disadvantages or limitations of childminding, if any?

Do you think there are ways in which some of these challenges can be overcome?

Benefits for parents / carers / families

What would you say are the main benefits for parents or carers of their child being looked after by a childminder? Again, we're particularly interested in the benefits parents for 3 and 4 year olds, and eligible 2 year olds, who are entitled to funded hours rather than for younger or older children.

FOR EACH BENEFIT MENTIONED PROBE, IF NECESSARY ON:

- What is it about childminding in particular that supports that?
- Can you give an example?
- Clarify if the benefit is in contrast to nursery and/or other care

Are there any other particular benefits for parents/carers compared to a nursery setting?

Are there any other particular benefits for parents/carers compared with informal care from grandparents or other relatives?

PROMPT IF NOT MENTIONED, are there any benefits for parents/carers in relation to:

- The hours provided?
- Being able to look after siblings?
- The continuity of care (children being cared for by same childminder for years)?
- Additional things you do to help and support parents? What are these things?

Are there parents/carers/families it works particularly well for?

PROMPTS: working pattern, age, parenting style/experience, family structure, location, income

How do you think the benefits of childminding for **parents** could be maximised?

And are there parents/families it works less well for – who might find another form of care more suitable?

PROMPTS: working pattern, age, parenting style/experience, family structure, location, income

What would you say are the main reason parents or carers choose a childminder over other childcare settings?

And more generally, what would you say are the disadvantages or limitations of childminding, from a parents' perspective, if any? (e.g. needing to co-ordinate time off with the childminder – holidays at the same time)

Do you think there are ways in which some of these challenges can be overcome?

COVID 19

We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a big impact for some childminders and their services. In what ways, if any, do you think the pandemic has affected **outcomes for the children you look after?**

PROMPT IF NOT MENTIONED:

- Disruption/break in continuity of care for children?
- Wellbeing of children

How has the pandemic affected the **families** you work with?

In what ways has the Covid-19 pandemic affected **your service and your ability to support families**?

PROMPT IF NOT MENTIONED:

- Impact on activities?
- Impact of stress on children/families/yourself?
- Uncertainties over future service provision
- Change and uncertainty of hours they are able to provide
- Relationships with parents (not being able to see parents as much or difficulties around finances during lockdown)
- Less contact with families
- Health concerns (including having had Covid or someone needing to shield)

childcare

In terms of **child outcomes**, what difference, if any, do you think it makes when childminding is funded as part of a child's government-funded hours?

PROBE ON POSITIVES/NEGATIVES

In terms of the impact on **parents and families**, what difference, if any, do you think it makes when childminding is funded as part of a child's government-funded hours?

PROBE ON POSITIVES/NEGATIVES

Have funded hours meant you have looked after children you would not otherwise have seen, or seen less of some children (e.g. because they go to nursery for their funded hours)?

How have the ELC funded hours impacted your services? [DON'T SPEND TOO LONG ON THIS TOPIC]

How has it impacted on the children you look after and their families?

Have you seen more families using blended models (as in a mix of childcare settings) as a result of funded hours?

IF YES: and what do you think are the benefits of this?
and what do you think are the challenges of this?

Have funded hours changed the amount of wraparound care/transition care you provide?

IF YES: and what do you think are the benefits of this?
and what do you think are the challenges of this?

Views on the future

Looking to the future, how do you think the benefits of childminding should be promoted?

What do you think are common misconceptions about childminding that need to be addressed?

What impact do you think the planned expansion of funded hours from 600 to 1,140 will have on your services [or has had, if already in place in their area]?

What impact do you think the expansion of funded hours will have on outcomes for children?

How has Covid-19 affected your future plans?

How has Covid-19 impacted your plans regarding the funded hours?

Wrap up

We're just coming to the end of the discussion now, but before we do, is there anything else you would like to say about the provision of your services or the benefits of childminding for children and families?

That's everything I wanted to ask you today, thank you very much for taking the time to speak to me.

[END]

B. Discussion Guide for Parents

INTRODUCTION

- Introduce self and Ipsos MORI
- Remind them of the purpose of the research: looking at their views on childminding and the impact on outcomes for children and their families
- Explain that the interview will last 45 mins to 1 hour and we will give participant £30 as a thank you for taking part.
- Provide reassurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Explain that no identifying information about individuals will be used in the reporting of the research and nothing will be fed back to their childminder.
- Explain that participation in the research is entirely voluntary, they don't have to answer any questions they are uncomfortable with
- Request permission to record interview.

BACKGROUND

To start off with, I have a few questions about you and your daily routine.

Can I ask who you currently live with?

ASK FOR AGE AND GENDER OF CHILDREN

Could you talk me through your routine in a typical week?

PROMPT ON:

- family life
- responsibilities / work / study etc
- pattern of childcare use (and the practical reasons for this) including informal care support they receive
- challenges they face

USE OF / GENERAL VIEWS ON CHILDMINDING

I now have some questions about your use of your childminding service.

How long have you been using a childminder?

What are the main reasons that you chose to use a childminder?

Why did you choose your particular childminder?

Did you consider other childcare options instead of using a childminder?

Does your child attend other childcare settings too? (note whether informal, or formal /a blended model)

Are you eligible for funded hours for your child/ren? [IF NECESSARY: I mean the free early learning and childcare that's provided by the Scottish Government for 3 and 4 year olds and some eligible 2 year olds]

Are your childminding hours funded through the local authority/Scottish Government?

- Have the hours always been funded? / how long for?

And if so, did your entitlement to funded hours make a difference to your choice to use a childminder?

What do you think makes a good childminder?

- What kinds of qualities and skills do they need to have?
- What are the top three things you want in a childminder?

In an ideal world, what would your childcare arrangements be?

IMPACT OF COVID-19

We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on parents and childcare arrangements, particularly when schools and nurseries closed last year. I'd now like to ask you a little more about that. If there's anything you would prefer not to talk about, please just say and we can move on.

IF NOT ALREADY COVERED: Has Covid-19 changed your childcare arrangements?

[PROBE ON CHILDMINDING SPECIFICALLY]

Has Covid-19 changed how you use your childminder at the moment?

Has Covid-19 changed how you think about your childcare arrangements/using a childminder in the long term?

IF THEY STARTED USING CHILDMINDING SERVICES SINCE THE PANDEMIC:

You mentioned that you started using a childminder during the Covid-19 pandemic. Do you plan to continue using them in the future?

IF THEY RELIED ON CHILDCARE SERVICES WHICH CLOSED DUE TO COVID-19:

You mentioned that you used to use childcare services which closed that closed due to the pandemic. Do you plan to return to these services and why?

BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

I'd now like to focus on what a childminding setting provides for your children.

Firstly, what do you think are the benefits of childminding for your child(ren)?

FOR EACH BENEFIT MENTIONED PROBE, IF NECESSARY, ON:

- What is it about the childminding environment in particular that supports that?
- Can you give an example?
- Clarify if the benefit is in contrast to nursery and/or other care

Are there any other particular benefits for your child(ren) compared to a nursery setting?

Are there any other particular benefits for your child(ren) compared with informal care from grandparents or other relatives?

PROMPT IF NOT MENTIONED- Are there any benefits in relation to:

- The home environment?
- The number or mix of other children?
- The continuity of care (being cared for by same childminder for years)?
- Support for transitions to group settings
- Children's learning and development? Which aspects?
- Emotionally? (for the child/ren)
- Social skills?
- Behaviour?
- The different activities they can do?

And more generally, what would you say are the disadvantages or limitations of childminding for children, if any?

PROMPT IF NEEDED:

- less opportunity for mixing in larger social groups
- Anything else?

BENEFITS FOR PARENTS

Now, I'd like to focus on the benefits of childminding for you as a parent or carer and for your family.

What do you think are the main benefits of childminding for you and your wider family?

FOR EACH BENEFIT MENTIONED PROBE, IF NECESSARY, ON:

- What is it about the childminding environment in particular that supports that?
- Can you give an example?
- Clarify if the benefit is in contrast to nursery and/or other care

Are there any other particular benefits compared to a nursery setting?

Are there any other particular benefits compared with informal care from grandparents or other relatives?

PROMPT IF NOT MENTIONED, are there any benefits for parents in relation to:

- The hours provided?
- Being able to look after siblings?
- The continuity of care (children being cared for by same childminder for years)?

And more generally, what would you say are the disadvantages or limitations of childminding, from a parents' perspective, if any?

PROMPT IF NEEDED:

- Practical – e.g. having to take holidays at same time as the childminder, lack of cover if they are unwell
- Anything else?

FUNDED HOURS

ASK ONLY IF USING ELC FUNDING: Did being able to use your child's funded hours with your childminder shape your decision to use them or continue using them?

Would you recommend using funded hours with a childminder?

IF NOT USING FUNDED HOURS: What are the reasons you do not use funded hours with your childminder? (may not be offered/eligible, but check for any other reasons)

Would you consider using childminding services as part of your child(ren)'s funded ELC?

BLENDED CARE

ASK IF USING BLENDED MODEL (2+ formal childcare settings):

You mentioned that your child/ren attend the childminder plus nursery / playgroup / another formal childcare setting –

What are the main reasons for that?

What are the benefits of having them in different childcare settings?

And what are the disadvantages?

Do you prefer one setting over the other for you child/ren?

RECOMMENDING CHILDMINDING SERVICES

What would you say to other parents considering using a childminder?

- what are the main selling points?
- what are the potential downsides?

What would encourage a greater use of childminders in Scotland?

Is there anything else that would make it more attractive to more parents and carers?

PROMPT IF NOT MENTIONED: do you think more childminders delivering funded hours would encourage more parents to use them?

WRAP UP

We're just coming to the end of the discussion now, but before we do, is there anything else you would like to say about the impact of childminding on your child, your family or just in general? That's everything I wanted to ask you today, thank you very much for taking the time to speak to me.

Appendix 2 – Recruitment materials

A. Letter to Childminders

Ipsos MORI



Dear Childminder,

Help us understand the benefits of childminding!

Ipsos MORI are carrying out research for the Scottish Government on the benefits of childminding for children and families. The aim is to better understand how people view childminding (including childminders and parents using childminding services), the benefits for families, and how childminding meets the needs of parents and children. The findings will then be used to increase understanding about the value of childminding and to support more parents to access it for their funded hours entitlement.

What's involved?

We're looking for childminders to take part in a telephone interview with a researcher from Ipsos MORI. We will ask about your views on the benefits of childminding and the different ways in which childminders support children and families. The call would be at a time convenient for you (this can be daytime or evening) and would last around 45 minutes to an hour. **To thank you for taking the time to talk to us, we would like to give you £30.**

We will use information from these interviews to write a report for the Scottish Government that will be published but will not include anything that could identify you. Everything you say will be confidential and your data will be stored securely. With your permission, the discussion will be audio recorded. Only the research team will have access to the recording and all data will be securely destroyed after completion of the research. Taking part in the research is completely voluntary. If you agree to take part, you are free to change your mind at any time without giving us a reason. We have a privacy policy for the project which you can see here: <https://ipsos.uk/childminding1>

Parent / carer interviews

We would also like to ask for your help to recruit parents / carers of pre-school children, so we can hear why they chose to use a childminder and how it works for them. This would also involve a telephone interview at a time convenient for them, and they would also receive £30 as a thank you. **If you think any of the parents of pre-school children you provide childminding for might be interested in taking part, please email them the attached message.** Even if you do not want to take part in the research yourself, it would be very helpful if you could pass the information on to parents.

It would be great if you could speak to parents, encourage them to take part and pass this on – but if this is not possible it is fine to simply forward the email to them. In two parent families, please pass on this information to the parent who you think is the best placed to comment on the impact of childcare arrangements for their child and their family. This may be the parent you have the most contact with when they drop off/pick up their child(ren). If you are delivering **ELC funded hours**, we are particularly keen to speak to you and the families you work with that are using the funding. However, if you are not delivering funded hours, we would still like to speak to you and your families.

We won't be asking parents to feedback on or evaluate your childminding service, as that is not the aim of this research, instead we will be asking them to talk generally about childminding and why it works for their family.

Get in touch

If you are interested in taking part, or have further questions, please get in touch with me by emailing **[EMAIL ADDRESS]** or phoning **[PHONE NUMBER]** by **26th February**.

Many thanks,

NAME, Research Manager, Ipsos MORI Scotland

[END]

B. Letter to Parents

Ipsos MORI



Dear Parent / Carer,

Share your experiences of childminding!

Ipsos MORI are carrying out research for the Scottish Government on the benefits of childminding for children and families. The aim is to better understand how people view childminding, the benefits for families, and how parents feel childminding meets the needs of them and their children. The findings will then be used to increase understanding about the value of childminding and to support more parents to access it for their funded hours entitlement.

We're looking for parents who are **currently using a childminder for their pre-school child or children** to take part in a telephone interview with a researcher from Ipsos MORI. We will ask about why you choose to use a childminder and how it works for you and your family. There are no right or wrong answers, we are just interested in your views and

experiences. The interview would be at a time convenient for you and would last around 45 minutes to an hour. To thank you for taking the time to talk to us, we would like to **give you £30**.

We will use information from these interviews to write a report for the Scottish Government that will be published but **will not include anything that could identify you**. Everything you say will be confidential and your data will be stored securely. We won't be asking you for feedback on your childminder's service, instead we will be asking you to talk generally about childminding and why it works for your family.

With your permission, the discussion will be audio recorded. Only the research team will have access to the recording and all data will be securely destroyed after completion of the research. Taking part in the research is completely voluntary. If you agree to take part, you are free to change your mind at any time without giving us a reason. We have a privacy policy for the project which you can see here: <https://ipsos.uk/childminding2>

If you are interested in taking part, or have further questions, please get in touch with me by emailing **[EMAIL ADDRESS]** or phoning **[PHONE NUMBER]** by **26th February**.

Many thanks,

NAME, Research Manager, Ipsos MORI Scotland

[END]

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact socialresearch@gov.scot for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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