

Education Research Programme

National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce Consultation: Analysis of Childminders' and Childcare Workers' Responses

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A Scottish Executive Education & Skills Directorate consultation, "National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce" took place between 10 August 2006 and 22 December 2006. As part of this consultation, a written consultation document was issued which was aimed specifically at individual childcare workers and childminders. Two hundred and one responses were received from childcare workers and fifty-eight from childminders. This is a summary of the analysis of these responses. The findings will inform the implementation of Investing in Children's Futures, the Scottish Executive's response to the Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce.

The consultation also comprised a main consultation paper and five workshops. The full report containing the analysis to all of these parts of the consultation has been published on the Scottish Executive website.

Main Findings

- The majority of childminders (62%) who responded to the childminders' consultation questions considered it very important or important to have qualifications that are on par with the rest of the early years and childcare workforce.
- Of the sizeable minority (38%) of childminders who did not consider parity of qualifications important, a common argument was that experience counts for more than qualifications.
- Seventy-two per cent of childminders who provided a view stated that they would undertake training and learning if it was recognised within a single qualifications and professional development framework across the whole early years and childcare sector.
- By far the most common factor identified as preventing childminders from undertaking training and learning was not having the time needed to pursue this.
- A recurring comment was that flexible patterns of delivering training and learning would help childminders start or continue their learning and development.
- There were mixed views amongst individual childcare workers on the proposal to raise the qualification level for managers and lead practitioners. Whilst many supported the proposal in order to increase the professionalism and status of the workforce, others considered that experience should count for more than paper qualifications.
- The vast majority (95%) of individual childcare workers who provided a view stated that their employer supported them in their CPD.

- Childcare workers were relatively evenly split between those who could identify training gaps between their initial training and their current work and those who could not identify gaps.
- Individual workers reported that providing opportunities for training and promotion, and a good reputation were attractive features of their previous or current employer.
- Most (83%) individual workers considered that better pay and terms of service would help employers attract new recruits and/or keep workers in the sector.

Context

The National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce was announced by the Minister for Education and Young People in June 2004. The Review group was chaired by the Scottish Executive and involved representatives of the main stakeholders extending from key representative bodies, training bodies and service providers to parents. Its overall task was to improve employment opportunities for early years and childcare staff and raise the status of the sector, including:

- Examining and defining the role and responsibilities of staff in the early years, childcare and play workforce;
- Determining an approach to national workforce planning;
- Rationalising and modernising early years/childcare qualifications, ensuring that they are appropriate for the different sectors of the workforce;
- Developing vertical and lateral career pathways which provide for progression within a chosen area and lateral movement between different sectors of the workforce;
- Consider the implications of these considerations for pay and conditions.

For the purposes of the Review, the workforce under consideration was defined as those groups of workers who are required to be registered with the Scottish Social Services Council and who work in:

- Early years care and learning;
- Out of school care and in playwork

As well as:

- Childminders who are registered with the Care Commission

A decision was taken that the Review should not include teachers working in early years settings as the teaching workforce had only recently been subject to a major review. However the Review group recognised that there was not a clear boundary round the workforce.

The Consultation

The written consultation "*National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce*" was live between 10 August 2006 and 22 December 2006. In addition, a shorter consultation document aimed at childminders and childcare workers was issued. Around 3,500 hard copies of the consultation papers were distributed largely to representative bodies to circulate to their members. All employers registered with the Care Commission received the consultation documents.

Four face-to-face workshops and one video-linked workshop were also undertaken. The workshops aimed to contribute to a body of expert knowledge on some of the issues emerging from the national Review of the early years and childcare workforce.

This summary note focuses on the written consultation aimed at childminders and childcare workers. This consultation document contained four questions for childminders and five questions for individual childcare workers. Fifty-eight childminders and two hundred and one childcare workers responded to the questions posed for them which sought their views on issues of qualifications, training, development and recruitment and retention respectively.

Aims

The aims of the research were to analyse the written and electronic responses to the written consultation document, to present the full range of views submitted, and produce a final report that analyses all responses to the consultation exercise.

Methodology

Responses to the written consultation for childminders and childcare workers were sent to the Scottish Executive consultation team either in hard copy or via e-mail. The consultation team sent copies of each response to The Research Shop for analysis.

An electronic Excel database was used to store and assist analysis of the responses. The analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Childminders' Views

Four key questions were aimed at childminders. The responses to these are summarised here.

Should childminders have qualifications on par with the rest of the workforce?

The majority (62%) of childminders considered it very important or important to have qualifications that are on par with the rest of the early years and childcare workforce. The most commonly provided reasons in support of this view were that parity would result in a better standard of care across the board; it would ensure a greater respect for and professional recognition of childminders; and it would give childminders more confidence.

Although gaining qualifications was seen as good in theory, some childminders remarked that in practice they had very little time available for this. Another concern was that people may be put off if qualifications were set at too high a level.

Amongst the minority of childminders who thought that it was not important for them to have parity of qualification, their main arguments were that experience counts for more than qualifications, and that the standard of service they provided would not be changed by having qualifications.

Would you undertake training and learning if it was recognised within a single qualifications and development framework for the whole of the sector?

Almost three-quarters (72%) of childminders considered that they would actively undertake training and learning if it was recognised within a single qualifications and professional development framework. Almost one-quarter (23%) stated that they would not go down this route, with the remaining 5% of childminders reporting that this depended on whether this would add to their current qualifications, or if time permitted or arrangements were suitable (e.g. evening workshops).

As a sole worker, what prevents you from undertaking training and learning?

By far the most common factor identified as preventing childminders from undertaking training and learning was to do with not having the time needed to pursue this (raised by 71% of childminders who responded).

Others argued that their own caring responsibilities prevented them from taking up training and learning

opportunities, or that undertaking training and learning was simply not worthwhile at their age. The cost of training was a disincentive to some childminders, with others considering their previous qualifications (e.g. teaching, nursing, and so on) sufficient for the job they were doing.

Other barriers raised by just a few consultees included: course content holding little relevance; difficulties of being assessed in the workplace; accessing courses without private transport; fear of failing/lack of confidence; and lack of peer support.

What would help you to start or continue your learning and development?

Over one-third (38%) of the childminders who responded to this question considered that flexible patterns of delivering training and learning would help them to start or continue their learning and development. More evening and weekend courses were called for with some childminders requesting that training be supported with crèche facilities.

Another common response was for financial help with attendance at courses to make up for loss of earnings. Less frequently mentioned were the need for more time to train; support (from authorities or peers) in training; more appropriate course content; more notice of when courses are to be held; more local courses; work-based training; and staff cover during training.

Childcare Workers' Views on Qualifications, Training and Development

Three key questions relating to qualifications, training and development were aimed at individual childcare workers. The responses to these are summarised here.

Is an SCQF level 9 (ordinary degree or equivalent) qualification for managers and lead practitioners high enough?

It was difficult to quantify the degree of support or opposition to the proposed level of qualification for managers and lead practitioners as those responding "yes" and those responding "no" comprised a mix of workers who agreed with introducing a level 9 requirement, and those who considered this to be too high.

Despite this confusion, it was clear that many members of the childcare workforce welcomed this proposal for a number of reasons including: makes the profession comparable with other professions; will promote the status

of the profession; ensures that children are being cared for by qualified people; will be in keeping with the demands of the job; best to have as wide a knowledge of child development as possible; ensures knowledge base is kept up-to-date; and helps to build on people's existing skills.

Many consultees qualified their support for level 9 with conditions. Most common amongst these was that the requirement for an academic qualification should be balanced with the need for experience amongst managers and lead practitioners.

Two main arguments dominated the responses opposed to level 9 for managers and lead practitioners. These were that experience should count for more than paper qualifications; and concern that the proposal will impact disproportionately on smaller settings and voluntary/private establishments in particular in terms of higher salaries to be paid, possibly leading to an exodus of staff from these settings or the closure of some of these establishments.

Does your employer support you in your continuing professional development (CPD)?

The vast majority (95%) of those individual childcare workers who responded to this question reported that their employer supported their CPD.

Many respondents described how their employer provided general support by showing an interest in their development, offering broad encouragement to pursue a programme of CPD and encouraging dissemination and feedback from courses amongst staff.

Others outlined the nature of more practical support given by their employer such as allowing time off for attendance at courses. Some consultees valued the advice and guidance provided by their employer regarding their CPD, e.g. by identifying suitable CPD opportunities and communicating these to staff.

Other members of the childcare workforce welcomed the way their employer facilitated their progress and empowered them to take responsibility for their own CPD, e.g. by having libraries and up-to-date resource materials within the workplace.

Some employers offered in-house training, sometimes with trainers brought in to deliver this.

Many respondents recommended that increased funding for training and for supply staff cover would provide them with further support. Calls were also made for paid study time away from work; for more e-learning opportunities; and for committee and board members to be made more aware of the need for CPD and the support they could provide to staff.

Are there any training gaps between what you were initially trained to do and the work you now carry out in the workplace?

Individual childcare workers who responded to this question were relatively evenly split between those who could identify training gaps and those who did not think that any significant gaps in their training had emerged.

The gaps identified most frequently were:

- Dealing with parents
- Writing reports/assessments
- Managerial skills
- Paperwork/administration
- Dealing with children with special needs

It was remarked that gaps such as dealing with multi-cultural issues and IT skills may gain in prominence as ethnicity profiles change and technology develops.

Childcare Workers' Views on Recruitment and Retention

Two key questions relating to recruitment and retention were aimed at individual childcare workers. The responses to these are summarised here.

Describe what attracted you to work for your current or any previous early years' employer

The attractions of current or previous employment most frequent raised in responses were:

- Opportunities for training and promotion; and
- Good reputation with a respected ethos

Other attractions mentioned less frequently included family-friendly hours; local work; attractive pay and conditions; and a good team spirit within the workplace.

How could employers attract new recruits or keep workers in the sector?

One key theme dominated the responses of individual workers, with 83% recommending that better pay and conditions would make jobs more attractive. Respondents called for better starting pay, clear increments linked to experience and qualifications and holiday and sickness entitlements. Some stated that pay should be competitive in relation to comparable posts in other organisations. Several

suggested that pay bonuses and incentives should be offered. The need for adequate pension provision was identified.

Three other factors which would make employment attractive to new recruits or retain workers in the sector were highlighted repeatedly:

- Clear career structure with opportunities for training (raised by 44% of respondents)
- Respect from employers and others (28%)
- Employer support/good communication/teamwork (12%)

Other recommendations were made by fewer than eight respondents and included: providing workers with more autonomy; reducing paperwork; providing more flexibility in working hours; offering longer working hours; better advertising of posts; more job security; good working conditions; more honesty in job descriptions; good team management; equal opportunities; higher staff:child ratios; realistic workloads; regular staff appraisals; and the provision of challenges and variety of work.

What Happens Next?

The views of all respondents to the consultation: fifty-eight childminders, two hundred and one individual childcare workers, one hundred and fifteen respondents to the main written consultation, and two hundred and ten stakeholders who took part in the workshops, are being considered by the Scottish Executive consultation team and other relevant policy-makers.

The findings to emerge from these submissions will inform the implementation of *Investing in Children's Futures*, the Scottish Executive's response to the work of the Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce.

The full report of the analysis of all of these consultation responses has been published on the Scottish Executive website. All non-confidential responses are available to view in the Scottish Executive library.

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This Research Findings is web only and can be downloaded from the Publications section of The Scottish Executive website www.scotland.gov.uk.

It reports specifically on the views of childminders and childcare workers and forms part of a series of reports on this consultation analysis. A Research Findings overview summary "RF No 25 National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce: Analysis of Written Consultation and Workshop Responses" and a full report on this research were published (web only) earlier this year in March 2007.

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