

NICMA – the Childminding Association

Position Paper on the development of a Transformation fund for the Childminding workforce in Northern Ireland

Introduction

Founded in 1984, NICMA - the Childminding Association is a membership organisation and regional charity which works to promote home based childcare and learning for the benefit of children, families and communities.

NICMA welcome the NI Assembly debate on the creation of a Transformation Fund, similar to that in existence in England and Wales, and advocates that this model should be considered to support the professional development of the childcare and early years workforce in Northern Ireland. The NIPPA briefing paper clearly identifies the current situation for staff working within the pre-school and private day care sectors and is to be commended, however the figures do not reflect the needs of childminders.

NICMA's vision for the future is one where all children are cared for, and provided with the opportunity to learn and develop in a safe, enjoyable home environment and where childminders are recognised and valued as skilled, qualified professionals.

The Childminding Sector currently provides:

- the most significant proportion of full day care (63%) and the largest number of childcare places (17,100)
- a workforce of 3,627, out of a total workforce of approx. 8,888¹
- the widest age range of children cared for (0 -14 years)
- for the longest period of the day (7.00am – 6.00pm)

With most childminders caring for between 3 and 5 children at any one time the support they give to developing children's social, physical, intellectual and emotional development can not be under-estimated.

Why is this important?

The right for families to have access to affordable, high quality childcare is fundamental to Northern Ireland's future economic prosperity, to tackling child poverty and to achieving the best possible outcomes for all our children. Unfortunately, there has been a serious lack of investment in the childminding sector over the years, especially in relation to training and quality.

Research and best practice indicates that the optimal way to deliver quality early years services for young children and their families is through an integrated approach to policy, funding and workforce development. It is clear in all areas of provision that the most significant impact on childcare provision is the quality of the adult / child relationship and this is affected by staff qualifications and training. The establishment of an integrated qualifications framework will support the drive for a better qualified workforce with coherent routes for entry, progression and career development.

Our proposal

NICMA proposes that future dialogue on the development of a Transformation fund in Northern Ireland considers the following issues:

¹ NISCC Sector Skills Agreement; Stage 1 Skills Needs Assessment Report for Early Years and Childcare sector

1. Childminders are the only form of registered childcare provision with no mandatory requirement for training and/or qualifications and this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. This lack of mandatory training serves not only to potentially reduce the quality of childminding provision but also undermines the value that is placed on childminding as a professional quality service that meets children's needs;
2. Research has highlighted that increasing the quality of Early Years provision, through training and access to qualifications, has a positive impact on achieving educational outcomes for children. Given the large numbers of children being cared for within the childminding sector the need for equal access to training and qualifications should be given utmost priority. NICMA advocate that a change in legislation is required to resolve this issue in line with current policy in England and Wales; this includes completing a first aid certificate within 6 months of registration;
3. Access to Accreditation initiatives to raise quality standards (e.g. Quality First and Children come First) within the childminding setting with the view to improving outcomes for children; and
4. Funding to maintain the existing core staff within NICMA (e.g. the Childminding Development officers and Childminding Network Coordinators) and additional resources to provide access to qualifications for core staff at level 4,5 & 6 which will subsequently provide graduate leadership and management to assess, plan and deliver a workforce development strategy for the childminding sector.

NICMA would welcome further debate on this issue and believe that a period of consultation, to include all key stakeholders, would ensure that the structuring of such a fund addresses the specific needs of the entire Early Years and Childcare sector. Key stakeholders should include the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, SkillsActive, lead departments including DE (the lead department for the Early Years Sector), DEL, DHSSPS, DSD and representation from the Private, Voluntary and Independent sectors including employers.

What will it cost?

Potential cost per annum:

Activity	Cost per annum
Mandatory Induction training for all newly registered childminders 300 prospective Childminders x £250 per person	£ 75,000
Access to level 3 qualifications (NVQ or equivalent) x 100 bursaries per annum	£120,000
Quality First Bursaries x 100 per annum £400 per person	£40,000
CPD NICMA Development Team Network coordinators x12 (2per annum) £1200 per year for 3 years	£7,200
Total cost	£242,200

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