

A Joint proposal for the continuation of Covid-19 funding for REGISTERED CHILDMINDERS

Submitted to the office of Education Minister Michele Mc Ilveen on the 18th October 2021

This proposal was written collaboratively by NICMA and Unite the Union Registered Childminders Branch committee.

**Introduction**

Due to the continuing fall out of Covid-19 Registered Childminders still face uncertainty moving forward, with both the sustainability of their business and the loss of earnings due to having to close their settings.

Please find enclosed the proposal that NICMA and the Unite Registered Childminders committee have compiled. This proposal is being submitted to support our request for continuous and additional funding for Registered Childminders (RCMs) settings to remain open and to allow RCMs to practice safely within the Guidance from the Department of Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The ongoing Covid-19 situation has presented a different set of challenges for RCMs and their assistants, especially since September 21 with schools and other childcare provisions opening up. Parents still working from home and the ending of furlough with many parents losing their employment. Over the course of this pandemic as situations changed, Unite Registered Childminders Branch and NICMA have completed a number of surveys, focus groups and Zoom open meetings. The latest survey information collated and evidence-based research collected form the basis of the data in this report.

This proposal is made up of two components based on the data below:

1. The first is the need for ongoing support through the Sustainability Fund, helping with overheads and costs relating to Covid-19 in implementing regulations and guidance, also the rise in household bills. It is worth noting that approximately 17,000 children at any one time, and up to 30,000 children overall in NI, are cared for by RCMs. As you will see from the data we collected, without ongoing support, RCMs will not be able to continue providing a service. Coupled with that, the end of furlough in September has resulted in job losses for parents. For many RCMs, this will mean additional burdens, financial strain, and possible closures of settings.
2. The second is for loss of earnings in 2 respects:
	1. Closure of settings because of isolation due to someone in your setting, regardless of source being tested positive for Covid-19.
	2. Closure of settings because a member of your family/household has to self-isolate pending the outcome of a PCR test.

# Key information from recently collected data

This survey was carried out in 8 days and gathered response from 789 Registered Childminders.

**Q1. Did you have to close your setting from July 2021 to present due to Covid-19?**



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Answer Choices** | **Responses** |
| Yes | 27.73% |
| No | 72.27% |
| **Total** | **789** |

**Q2. If yes, how many days did you have to close?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Responses** | **Average number of days closed** |
| 366 | 15 |

**Q3. Did you have to close your setting more than once from July 2021 due to Covid-19?**

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Answer Choices** | **Responses** |
| Yes | 8.86% |
| No | 91.33% |
| **Total** | **789** |

**Q4. If yes, how many times did you have to close?**

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Answer Choices** | **Responses** |
| 1 | 7.64% |
| 2 | 6.22% |
| 3 | 1.70% |
| 4 | 0.28% |
| 5 | 0.28% |
| N/A | 83.88% |
| **Total**  | **789** |

**Q5. If you had to close you’re setting more than once, then how many days in total were you closed?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Responses** | **Average number of days closed** |
| 287 | 5 |

**Q6. Have you lost income from July 2021 due to a child in your setting having to self-isolate?**

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Answer Choices** | **Responses** |
| Yes | 42.17% |
| No | 57.83% |
| **Total** | **789** |

**Q7. If yes, how many times has a child in your setting had to self-isolate due to Covid-19?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Responses** | **Average number of days closed** |
| 448 | 3 |

**Q8. Do you have an assistant?**

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Answer Choices** | **Responses** |
| Yes | 7.97% |
| No | 92.03% |
| **Total** | **789** |

**Q9. Has your setting returned to full capacity pre Covid-19?**

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Answer Choices** | **Responses** |
| Yes | 42.54% |
| No | 57.46% |
| **Total** | **789** |

**Q10. If no, how many full time spaces do you have available?**

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Answer Choices** | **Responses** |
| 1 | 16.82% |
| 2 | 21.71% |
| 3 | 9.91% |
| 4 | 2.31% |
| 5 | 1.63% |
| 6 | 0.27% |
| 7 | 0.00% |
| 8 | 0.27% |
| N/A | 47.08% |
| **Total**  | **789** |

**Q11. If no, how many part time spaces do you have available?**

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Answer Choices** | **Responses** |
| 1 | 15.43% |
| 2 | 22.59% |
| 3 | 11.02% |
| 4 | 3.86% |
| 5 | 1.24% |
| 6 | 0.55% |
| 7 | 0.14% |
| 8 | 0.55% |
| N/A | 44.63% |
| **Total**  | **789** |

**Q12. Are you under capacity due to the following? (Please select all that apply)**

* **Parents working from home**
* **Children now attending unregistered childminders**
* **A rise in part time placements**
* **Parents made redundant**
* **Personal choice**
* **NA- I am not under capacity**
* **Other**

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Answer Choices** | **Responses** |
| Parents working from home | 37.61% |
| Children attending unregistered childminder | 6.16% |
| A rise in part time placements | 6.03% |
| Parents made redundant | 4.33% |
| Personal Choice | 9.17% |
| N/A – I am not under capacity | 30.41% |
| Other | 6.29% |
| **Total**  | **789** |

**Q13. If other, please specify.**

**Parents choosing to care for child as too nervous of them being away from home.**

**I had 2 families whose parents are teachers and kids didn’t come to me over the summer months as I needed a break and I just mind 3 kids from same family (parents doctors). I decided not to take back teachers' kids in September as I found the pressure s of covid-19 and all the guidelines and box-ticking too overwhelming. Too much pressure by Early Years and not enough support from them.**

**No interest as anyone I speak to with new babies are sending children to family to stop the spread of covid-19 rather than more exposure**

**The spaces I have available don’t match the needs of my enquiries**

**After schools clubs**

**Own daughter has turned 12 and no longer counted in my numbers. Struggling to fill her space**

**Parents trying to reduce cost**

**One child’s parents want grandparents to mind**

**Trying to fit around pick ups**

**Parents cutting hours as they work from home**

**Lack of demand**

**Due to cleaning and preparation**

**Children can’t settle after lockdown and being with parents for so long**

**I have come across so many unregistered childminders. Prospective parents even comparing me to my face about unregistered childminders and opting to go with them. It's completely destroyed my business**

**Parent leaving as i was closed due to covid-19**

**I want to keep the children and my family as safe as possible therefore I am having to limit my numbers**

**Ratios. I have had multiple enquiries from 2/3 child families but there is always an under which I cannot accommodate there I can am finding it very hard to fill afterschool spaces.**

**Closed 3 times so hard to take on new work, children leaving because of it and relocation etc**

**School wrap around taking a lot of business**

**I closed so many times parents thought my setting was unsafe.**

**A mixture of parents working from home and only requiring part time hours so reduced income trying to accommodate this and keep under my numbers**

**After school’s club and parents still on shorter working hours**

**Parents cutting hours as working from home or taking children away altogether**

**Parents working from home, rise in part-time placement, transfer to day nursery when I was shielding and did not return, several grandparents retiring early**

**Can't fill my places with school staggering times out I can only be at one school at particular time staggering times at schools really affecting who we can take on as we can't collect together now from different classes maybe half hr between classes children standing about waiting not good**

**Ratios issue- demand available**

**Part time school age. Not a lot of enquiries for those**

**Parents looking for only one day a week**

**Lots off part time enquiries**

**Q14. Have you incurred any extra costs due to Covid-19 from July 2021?**



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Answer Choices** | **Responses** |
| Yes | 66.28% |
| No | 33.72% |
| **Total** | **789** |

**Q15. If yes, what costs did you incur and for what?**

Average cost up £75 per month

Cost of single use PPE

Additional and ongoing cleaning materials, including towels

Increase in use and cost of Heating

Increase in use and cost of Electricity

Increase cost of Food

The cost of new toys and play equipment that is easier to clean

# This Data shows that almost 43% of Registered Childminder settings are still not up to their full pre Covid capacity and therefore ongoing support for RCMs and their assistants are justified. The main reason cities Parents still working from home.

# It is therefore vital that RCMs and their assistants are continued to be supported through this period of Covid -19 as parents, once they return to work, will need childcare places. It is therefore imperative that government ensures the retention of RCMs and ensures that this vital service is not lost due to loss of income or flight from the sector to alternative employment.

# The data also shows since July 21 and almost 2 months since schools reopened 28% of RCMs settings have been affected by temporary closures due to someone in their setting testing positive for Covid-19, thus resulting in loss of income. Proving how vital the Loss of Earnings fund

# Case study Scenarios

# Case Study 1.

# Number of closures since July: 3 (all from mid-August)

**Loss of income from July**:  This is hard to calculate as two of the closures were covered by Closure Fund.  Before closure fund, I estimate lost income to be around £1000.

That does not take into consideration a child who was a close contact and parent kept child at home, they did not pay me, loss estimated at £200.

That also does not include the families that have left me due to Covid closures, which would have been an ongoing income of approx £200 per week.

**Children affected**- 5 each time I had to close.

**Closures due to my own family**- 2

**Struggle to receive financial support** - The first time I closed as child in my setting tested positive, I was advised verbally to close by PHA.  As the self isolation guidance had changed, I was not entitled to anything, however all the children affected opted to stay at home and complete 10 days isolation, so I had no choice but to close for 10 days.  I did argue my case with Early Years, but was forced to withdraw my application.  My other two closures were straightforward and my claims to the closure fund were successful.

**My thoughts on the state of the sector:**

I have been a Registered Childminder for 15 years, I absolutely love my job, caring for children is incredibly rewarding.  However, since March 2020 everything has changed.  I was forced to close my business for eight months and was reliant on Universal Credit.  It was a very difficult time for my family.  We struggled week to week to afford food and essentials.

Closures have become a way of life for Registered Childminders, I have been closed due to Covid at least 7 times.  If it had not been for the self employment grants,  the Closure Fund and grants from Early Years my business would not have survived.  And for that, I am eternally grateful.

However, the one thing that does not seem to be considered is my reputation as a reliable childminder.  Having to close regularly puts a huge strain both on myself and my families.  Families need reliable childcare or they are going to look elsewhere.  They do not need the additional pressure of trying to find alternative childcare when they already have a trusted childminder!!!

On top of direct financial loss through closure, I have lost business from several families who have left me due to my constant closure.  I completely understand their circumstances but the loss has left me with a number of vacancies which I am struggling to fill and a considerable financial shortfall.

On top of everything else, I have to allow extra time twice a day for cleaning and sanitising my setting.  There is also a lot of extra paperwork.  It is very hard to factor this cost in, if I raise my prices, I will have more difficulty filling vacancies.

My mental and physical health has declined rapidly since last March.  Worrying about closure, worrying about money, worrying about the health of myself and my family, worrying about keeping the children in my care safe, worrying about filling vacancies in the midst of Covid, it has all become too much.

The Closure Fund is now closed, and the self-isolation rules have changed.  So what happens if myself or a member of my family tests positive for Covid?  I am expected to close for 10 days with no income?

I do love my job, I am very proud of my profession, but I don't want to do it anymore under the current circumstances.  The stress of being self- employed is just too great.  I am struggling to cope and leaving childminding may be my only option.

Case Study 2.

I’ve been a Registered Childminder for 3yrs and prior to Covid I had 4 children full time throughout the week. During Covid I lost all 4 children due to parents working from home or furloughed. While I stayed open for business I had no parents approach me for childcare. While I received a small amount from the SEISS, I was grateful for the Sustainability funding this helped me with my overheads etc.

Since the schools and workplaces have started to open up again I have been slowly building my business up at present I have 2 children part-time, with another 2 children starting with me shortly. It will take time for me to build my business up as I am still only earning half of what I used to earn prior to Covid-19. While I considered giving up childminding completely and seeking employment elsewhere, I knew I would miss the job that I loved and so have decided to stick with it.

CASE STUDY 3

RCM for 8 years she cares for four children from three different families, this is her first closure and experience of claiming financial assistance from the isolation funds from Early Years the Organisation. RCM has four children of her own two of her children aged 4 and 2 became unwell over the bank holiday weekend. RCM’s children developed a temperature of 39.9 a recognised symptom of Covid-19, she booked a Covid-19 PCR test the first results got lost in the system and she had to rebook. RCM has two older children one in primary school and one in high school to ensure she did everything to prevent a potential spread these children stayed at home until tests results came back. RCM normally provides childcare services on a bank holiday but notified all families that as a precaution and until she can seek advice from PHA and her SW on the Tuesday following the Bank Holiday she would remain closed. RCM spoke with a PHA medic who called her back on Tuesday morning, 31st Aug who confirmed that she had followed correct procedures and she should close pending results of PCR test, she also spoke with her SW on Tuesday morning who confirmed that as her children were unable to isolate due to their age that she should remain closed until PCR results came back. RCM sought financial assistance from EY, the organisation and has been refused due to lack of evidence that she should have closed, and at one point was told “anybody can book a test and apply for funding”. RCM provided EY, the organisation with screenshots of the telephone calls she made with PHA, SW and the test dates and results. RCM has been left feeling anxious, disappointed, reduced to tears, feels she has let the parents she provides childcare for down and fearful that her parents believe she is unreliable. RCM has bills to pay and has been let down by the system that was designed to assist in her time of need, she remains unpaid from the isolation fund to this date. RCM is not unique in there are so many RCMs who are closed and are facing further closures as the winter pressures months are now upon us.

Minister extension of the financial funds would assist all RCMs and ensure that they continue to work in this invaluable sector, some have taken up second jobs, others have left the sector. We need to ensure that parents can continue to avail of their preferred choice of childcare and that children can continue to be cared for in a home from home environment.

Case Study 4.

I have been a Registered Childminder for 18yrs. On 16th March 2020 I had 5 children 1 fulltime and 2 part time and 2 after schools and I was earned almost £1500 per month. My business closed almost overnight as my parents worked in hospitality, beauty and one was a teacher. At the same time my husband was furloughed, so from May 2020 I struggled to make ends meet. We had to use our savings that were on a fixed rate with the bank and we couldn’t access them until Sept 20 and we then had to pay a penalty to lift the money.

I was grateful for the Recovery/Sustainability funding it helped me survive but also helped me buy a fogger that I use daily to clean my home and most importantly the seats in my car which I use to transport the children.

It was a very stressful 2020 I’m almost up to full capacity and hopefully there won’t be any further closures.

# Context

Once you qualify as a Registered Childminder, you can care for up to six children per day. Childminders own child are included in these ratios. An RCM can care for three children under compulsory school age (of which only one can be under one year old) and three school age children. Where the RCM has an assistant, they can care for up to eight children per day, pending approval from Early Years. Six of these children can be under compulsory school age, two of which can be under one years old.

RCMs have a number of compulsory fees, insurances, training, heating and electric requirements and the usual tax commitments amongst other expenses to take into account, regardless of the number of children in their care. Taking into consideration, the further added expense for RCMs in implementing regulations and guidance, particularly around infection control.

#  Actions required

As presented and agreed by the Minister in our previous proposals, the need for ongoing support for COVID19 compliance is inevitable and essential.

**The first component we seek is an extension to the Childcare Recovery Support scheme from July to December of £300 per month per Registered Childminder**.

The second component is to extend the **loss of earnings fund.**

**Part A** – This would be for complete closure of a setting for 10 working days due to Covid-19. We recommend £400 per week for loss of earnings for each RCM and £600 if there is an assistant.

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**Part B** - We would ask the Minister for help in replacing lost income when a family/ household member has to self isolate pending a PCR test.

The fact 40% of all daily positive cases come from schools, shows the extreme pressure our sector is facing.  Coupled with the recent guidelines to test on day two and day eight is leaving RCM's wide open to positive cases as children are permitted to attend between these days.

It is an absolute necessity that the closure funding continues.

In conclusion, it is impossible for anyone to foresee how this pandemic will continue to impact upon Registered Childminder’s settings, the children for whom they care, and the families that they support. Over the past 18mths, this has been a fluid and ever changing situation. The above proposal is based on the most up to date survey data of 789 Registered Childminders and the real life experiences that we envisage will only continue as this pandemic remains an issue.

This proposal requires your urgent attention and action to ensure the survival of the Registered Childminding sector. We would also ask that any intervention by the Minister and the Department consider that Registered Childminders and their Assistants have been adversely affected by setting closures throughout this pandemic. We would gratefully request that any intervention be paid retrospectively to this date.

This proposal was written and compiled through the cooperation of the Unite

Registered Childminders committee and the Northern Ireland Childminding Association. All data was collected by the two organisations and pooled together to form this joint submission. It is the intention of both organisations to share this proposal with our members.