



## ncma policy briefing

# Developing a professional childcare workforce is key to the Welsh Assembly Government's National Childcare Strategy.

The Assembly Government's goal is to make working with children an attractive and high status career and develop a skilled and flexible workforce. Childcare is a completely devolved policy area in Wales and the Assembly Government is fully responsible for the direction in which it is developed. However, some workforce development activities are the same across England and Wales, particularly where this will facilitate common understanding and standards amongst those working with children on both sides of the border.

NCMA welcomes this, and is keen to ensure that the contribution of registered childminders is recognised and that they are able to participate fully in the Government's plans to create a professional childcare workforce.

### Workforce Reform

In 2004, an Assembly Childcare Working Group was convened to produce a report on the future direction

of childcare in Wales. This formed the basis of the Assembly Government's Childcare Strategy for Wales, published in November 2005. Against the background of the Assembly working group's recommendations, and also the emerging workforce reform programme in England, the development of the children's workforce has a central role within the Childcare Strategy for Wales.

### Measures to reform the workforce in Wales include:

- A Workforce Development Plan for Wales to improve the skills and productivity of the sector's workforce, underpinned by a scoping exercise of the current early years and childcare sector.
- Action to develop Welsh language skills in the sector to meet the demand for Welsh medium and bilingual childcare.
- A high profile national recruitment campaign.
- Welsh Assembly involvement in the

development of a Common Core of Skills and Knowledge (across England and Wales).

To achieve these objectives, the Care Council for Wales (CCW) has been allocated responsibility for the under 8s daycare workforce development via their 2005/06 remit letter from the Welsh Assembly Government. CCW is already the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the social care sector, and regulations will eventually be made to encompass childcare providers within the definition of this workforce.

Under the terms of its SSC licence, CCW is required to set up a Children's Workforce Network for Wales, which will lead on the production and implementation of the workforce development plan. A Childcare and Early Years Network already exists, but the new network will bring together all SSCs with responsibility for childcare in Wales. CCW is also represented on the UK-wide SSC for Social Care, Children and Young People, called Skills for Care and Development. This demonstrates

the ministerial commitment to pursue an agenda in Wales that complements developments in England in order to facilitate the movement of childcare professionals across the border.

### Training to improve skills and effectiveness

At present, NCMA has a contract with the Department for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks (DEIN) within the Welsh Assembly to fund pre-registration training using the joint CACHE/NCMA course Introduction to Childcare Practice (ICP). The funding available to new childminders also extends to a contribution towards further units of the level 3 Diploma in Home-based Childcare (of which ICP is the first unit) or Quality First, one of NCMA's quality assurance schemes. Funding for childcare training is available from local authorities, but this is very inconsistent and patchy.

NCMA believes that it is essential that childminders are able to access funding for at least a level 3 qualification. Childminders have sole responsibility for the children in their care and work on their own, running and managing their own small businesses, without the support of a management structure. In addition, a level 3 qualification or above will enable childminders to integrate into the wider childcare workforce; will ensure positive outcomes for the 300,000 children looked after by childminders in England and Wales each day; and will help childminders to move into other areas of the children's profession as they develop in their careers, for example by caring for disabled children, or delivering early years education as part of a Children Come First (CCF) quality assured childminding network.

The Assembly Government's Flying Start initiative, which will fund good quality childcare as well as health and parenting support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, will include funding for childcare training. Under the scheme, "leaders and managers" of settings will need to hold a level 3 qualification, rising to level 4

by 2015, and all staff working in Flying Start settings will need to reach level 3 by 2015. Additionally, practitioners will have to belong to their professional associations' quality assurance schemes, (in the case of childminders, a CCF network) for which local authorities must make funding available.

### Design of training courses

It is essential that training is fashioned to accommodate the working conditions of childminders and nannies. Childminders run small (often solo) businesses providing a flexible service to parents. They often work irregular and/or long hours – a third of childminders work in excess of 50 hours a week. NCMA recommends that training involves: evening and weekend classes; online learning; blended training (a mixture of classroom and distance learning); and accredited courses relevant to home-based practice. The Care Council for Wales is currently holding discussions with the Assembly's Department for Education Lifelong Learning and Skills about how funding for childcare training in Wales can be made more available, accessible and above all, more fairly subsidised across the different local authorities.

### Qualifications

Reform of the qualifications, status and experience of the childcare workforce is needed if parents are to be assured that their children are receiving good quality care. In Wales, the Care Council for Wales will be leading the review of childcare qualifications as part of its workforce development plan, primarily through the Children's Workforce Network. Priorities include the development of a rationalised qualifications framework that will establish clear career progression routes within early years care and education. CCW will also formulate a Qualification Attainment Strategy, which will encompass the improvement of existing qualifications, underpinned by National Occupational Standards. In addition, Skills for Care and Development will be completing

the Sector Skills Agreement across the UK. This will present the learning needs of employers and their staff, the issues relating to the supply of learning and solutions to ensure that the current gaps are adequately addressed. This process will be available for consultation in spring 2007.

## "Flying Start" will fund childcare training and parent support

### Early Years Professional model

The Assembly Government is monitoring the development of the Early Years Professional status in England. At this stage, the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills has stated that a "social pedagogue" model will be considered in Wales as part of the workforce development activities, but that there is much more work to do on this proposal before a decision is made.



# 76 per cent of network childminders believe that greater access to training improved the quality of their service

## Role of Networks

Children Come First (CCF) quality assured childminding networks are groups of childminders managed by a professional network coordinator. They remain self-employed but receive support and development from the coordinator, building on their skills and extending the services they offer.

NCMA's Children Come First scheme is a quality-assurance programme delivered through childminding networks. It is the only nationwide quality-assurance programme endorsed by the Government's Investors in Children scheme to focus on networking childminders so as to raise and ensure quality standards (for more information visit

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/improvingquality/guidance/investorsinchildren>). Developed in conjunction with government departments and regulators, at the beginning of 2006 there were 16 Children Come First (CCF) networks based in Wales.

CCF-approved networks follow certain guidelines:

- All CCF networks have a network coordinator.
- Childminders must demonstrate to the network coordinator that they meet certain standards before they can become a network member.

Once accepted onto the network, the coordinator will visit each network childminder regularly to ensure that

## Caerphilly Children Come First childminding network

The Caerphilly Children Come First Childminding Network was first quality-assured by Children Come First in 2002 and was successfully re-approved in 2005. The network's membership and profile have grown during the six years it has been established and continues to do so. Ten childminders are currently undergoing assessment to join the network, which will take numbers up to its target of 34. A waiting list is also being drawn up and, subject to funding, the local authority is keen to establish a second network from April 2007 to meet the demand. The network provides community childminding placements and network childminders are accredited to provide early years education.

Most of the network childminders hold the full level 3 qualification, the Certificate in Childminding Practice (CCP), with others currently working towards the final unit of the award. Childminders undergoing assessment to join the network will shortly begin studying for the new Diploma in Home-based Childcare, which replaces the CCP. Most childminders on the network also hold the gold



standard award under the local authority's Healthy Snack Initiative, and the rest are expected to have achieved this level by the end of 2007.

The network coordinator has seen remarkable progress in the professional development of the network childminders as a result of high quality and regular training. Most recently, this has included sessions on managing children's behaviour, and the autistic spectrum. The quality of the network training, and its benefits to childminders, is widely recognised in the authority, which means that the coordinator is often approached by local childminders who are interested in joining the network.

The network has enabled the professionalism and confidence of the childminder members to grow. Many innovative practices have been initiated by the childminders, most notably setting up a successful bilingual childminding group in response to requirements of the new National Foundation Phase curriculum in Wales for children aged 3 to 7. Some have spoken at events to promote accredited childminding in neighbouring authorities.

Childminding is highly valued by the local authority and the success of the network demonstrates what can be achieved with the appropriate support. Other incentives that generate interest in the network, as well as quality service provision generally, include the authority's individual Quality Assurance Grant of £100 towards network approval or completion of NCMA's Quality First, and attendance allowance for childminder training sessions. The Caerphilly network hopes to enable childminders to undertake a level 4 qualification.

they are maintaining and building upon this standard of care.

The coordinator will ensure that the childminders are continually building on their knowledge by arranging training and offering chances for them to receive peer support and innovative work from other partners, such as social services.

Membership of a CCF network is clearly linked to training and qualifications. A study in April 2005 found that over half of network childminders already had a relevant level 3 qualification and another 22 per cent were working towards one. This compares with just 27 per cent of childminders in general having a level 3 or higher qualification. 76 per cent of the network childminders surveyed believed that greater access to training improved the quality of service they provided and 91 per cent said that network membership encouraged them to train.

CCF networks should also be linked to local integrated children's centres to help integrate childminders with the wider children's workforce.

CCF networks are a proven model of workforce transformation that help retain and develop childminders. NCMA



hopes that the forthcoming workforce development plan for Wales will help train childminders as accredited educators within NCMA Children Come First networks. This would enable them to provide early years education as well as childcare for young children with special educational needs and also to provide services under the Welsh Assembly's Flying Start programme.

## Over half of network childminders surveyed already hold a level 3 qualification

### Further information

- Statistics within this document were taken from The Role of Approved

Childminding Networks in Changing Practice, undertaken by the Early Childhood Unit at the National Children's Bureau. The report is available from the library at [www.ncmaccf.org.uk](http://www.ncmaccf.org.uk), where you will also find more information about starting a network and the Children Come First quality-assurance process

- At 31 March 2006 there were 224 childminding networks in England and Wales quality assured by the Children Come First scheme.
- There are 73,000 registered childminders in England and Wales; almost 50,000 of them are members of the National Childminding Association.



### National Childminding Association

NCMA publishes online policy briefings at regular intervals. You can find them at [www.ncma.org.uk](http://www.ncma.org.uk). These include a briefing on workforce development in England (PB05).

The National Childminding Association is a membership organisation and charity. It works to promote quality, home-based childcare for the benefit of children, families and communities.

Membership of NCMA is open to all home-based childcarers: registered childminders, over-7s childminders and nannies. NCMA also offers membership to not-for-profit organisations, for example, local authorities.

NCMA has offices across England and Wales and staff work at a local level to support and develop childminding. On a day-to-day basis this includes offering training, recruiting new childminders and promoting childminding.

Staff also work with local partners such as integrated children's centres to develop innovative solutions to families childcare needs, whether this is respite care, unusual hours, short-term placements or parenting support. You can find a full list of NCMA's regional contact details at [www.ncma.org.uk](http://www.ncma.org.uk).

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