



## ncma policy briefing

# Developing a professional childcare workforce is one of the four key aims of the Government's Every Child Matters programme.

The Government's goal is to make working with children an attractive and high-status career and develop a skilled and flexible workforce. NCMA welcomes this initiative and is keen to ensure that the contribution of home-based childcarers is recognised and that they are able to participate fully in the Government's plans to create a professional childcare workforce.

### Every Child Matters – Workforce Reform

In 2003 the Government laid out measures to reform the childcare workforce. The aim of these measures was to improve the status, skills, flexibility and rates of retention of childcare workers.

Included in these measures were:

- A workforce reform strategy to improve the skills and effectiveness of the children's workforce; and a review of rewards and incentives across the childcare sector, with the aim of fairly rewarding skills and responsibilities and providing

incentives for good practitioners to stay on the front line.

- A high profile recruitment campaign.
- Common occupational standards across the children's/childcare sector, linked to modular qualifications which allow workers to move between jobs more easily.
- A common core of training for those who work solely with children and families and those who have wider roles (such as GPs and the police) to help secure a consistent response to children's and families' needs and a better understanding of professional roles.
- Development of an integrated workforce to work across the children and young people's sector.

To achieve these objectives the Government created the Children's Workforce Unit in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). It also created Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) for childcare workers in each of the four

constituent nations. The Children's Workforce Development Council is the Sector Skills Council for England. The four councils form part of the Children's Workforce Network, an umbrella body coordinating across the UK.

### Training to improve skills and effectiveness

In its ten-year strategy for childcare, launched in December 2004, the Government set out its plan to improve the skills and effectiveness of childcare practitioners. The Childcare Act 2006 includes a requirement (Section 13) that local authorities secure the provision of training for any registered childcarers in their area. This does not explicitly require them to fund this training but they must ensure that there is sufficient provision. At present local authorities are required to fund induction training (such as the joint CACHE/NCMA course Introduction to Childcare Practice [Home-based]).

Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) fund qualifications for childcare practitioners

and managers to support continuing professional development. Currently LSCs provide funding for training towards a level 2 qualification (equivalent to a high pass at GCSE) but the DfES has written to them recommending that they extend provision to level 3 (A level standard).

In the meantime, the DfES has created the Transformation Fund, which “aims to raise the quality of early years provision by supporting workforce development without compromising the affordability and availability of childcare”.

Launched in February 2006, the Fund will provide £500m over two years to local authorities to train early years staff beyond level 2. Part of this money will be directed towards “increasing the numbers with a level 3 qualification” and “support for staff undertaking training to work with disabled children and those with special educational needs”.

The guidance notes for local authorities (issued 30 March 2006) state that it “is intended to supplement [existing] provision ... It will be open to childminders who care for under-5s... It offers support for training, additional to that normally undertaken, for staff to improve their qualifications to achieve a full level 3 and up to level 5 qualification in a relevant subject”. The guidance goes on to note that it is “imperative to increase the proportion of the workforce trained to level 3 and the need to equip staff to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage”.

NCMA believes that it is essential that childminders be provided with level 3 training. Childminders have sole responsibility for the children in their care and work on their own, running their own small businesses, without the support of a management structure. In addition, a level 3 qualification will enable childminders to integrate into the wider childcare workforce; will help ensure positive outcomes for the estimated 300,000 children looked after by childminders each day; and will help childminders to move into other areas of the children’s

profession as they develop in their careers (e.g. caring for disabled children, running a playgroup or qualifying as a social worker).

#### 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 offers: evening and weekend classes; online learning; blended training (a mixture of classroom and distance learning); and accredited courses relevant to home-based practice.

In addition, NCMA hopes that the LSCs will allow credit accumulation and transferability so that, after the completion of each credit, childminders can slowly build up their qualification and so are encouraged to continue their professional development.

#### Qualifications

Reform of the qualifications, status and experience of the childcare workforce is

## The Transformation Fund will provide £500m for training over two years

needed if parents are to be assured that their children are receiving good quality care. The Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC), which is the Sector Skills Council for childcare in England, has recommended that childcare be seen as a career parallel with teaching. This would mean that highly qualified childcare practitioners could aim for level 4 and higher qualifications in the knowledge that, were they to decide to move from Early Years to Later Years teaching, they would have the qualifications necessary and would only require a foundation course to provide sector-specific knowledge (in the same way that a



qualified teacher would require basic Early Years training to move into childcare).

### Development of the Early Years Professional

NCMA supports the creation of Early Years Professional status, so that childcare professionals such as childminding network coordinators and generic development workers in local authorities have the training and qualifications required to lead childcare practice in their field.

However, NCMA is concerned that the drive to encourage graduates into the childcare profession may prejudice the development of existing, experienced practitioners. While the entry of graduates into the profession is to be welcomed, local authorities, LSCs and the Transformation Fund should also invest in those already delivering childcare services to achieve graduate qualifications.

NCMA is pleased to note that new and additional resources are being made available to develop graduate programmes and support the training of Early Years Professionals to levels 4 to 6. NCMA believes that this should build upon the successful model of

## Training must accommodate the needs of childminders and nannies

Early Years Foundation degrees, higher level NVQs and suitable continuing professional development for nursery teachers, but extend the provision to the whole children's workforce. This wider group would include childminders, nannies and generic workers/coordinators.

### Role of networks

Childminding networks are groups of childminders led by a professional network coordinator. The childminders remain self-employed but receive support, monitoring and training from the coordinator, building on their skills and extending the services they can 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 network 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, on 30 June 2006 there were 328 quality-assured NCMA Children Come First childminding networks.

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 they are maintaining and building upon this standard of care.
- The coordinator will ensure that the

### North East Lincolnshire Children Come First childminding network

North East Lincolnshire Children Come First Childminding Network is a cluster model network made up of two linked networks, one of which focuses on supporting teenage parents. With 45 network childminders in total, there is a waiting list to join and also for network childminders to become accredited to deliver early years education. The network coordinator believes this increase in size is due to the quality and variety of the training that is on offer.

The network coordinators work closely with the local authority and are currently considering inset days, where the council will provide courses and financially support network childminders whilst they attend. The local authority will support 18 hours of training a year at the childminders' discretion. It already funds three CCF network evenings a year where the network members meet, have a meal, and undergo training.

From 1 April a requirement of CCF network membership

will be that all childminders have or are working towards a level 3 qualification. Forty-three per cent of childminders in the area are qualified to level 3. Sixteen childminders are on the Extending Childminding Practice course in order to complete their Certificate in Childminding Practice. The new Diploma in Home-based Childcare and NVQ 3 courses are also receiving financial support.

There are eight support groups across North East Lincolnshire which any childminder can access at any of the locations. Staff are available to talk to childminders and at one group the Early Years Advisor attends to offer curriculum guidance.

The network coordinator feels that the authority embraces childminding and fully recognises the benefits that home based childcare offers. With the support of the local authority the CCF network has increased training and development for all childminders in the area.



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.

Seventy-six 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 Sure Start 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 Transformation Fund 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, including those with special educational needs.

### Further information

- Statistics within this document were taken from *The Role of Approved Childminding Networks in Changing Practice*, research 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 childminding 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.

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

### 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 Wales (ref PB04).

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 childcare workers: 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 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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