Childminding practice in England

Final report

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Executive summary

Childminders provide care to children in a home environment: childcare for children under age 5 years and after school provision for school age children. ‘Early years’ childminders caring for children from birth to 5 years must register on the Early Years Register and deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The EYFS is a statutory framework implemented in 2008 that combines standards in education, care and welfare for young children. As early years providers, childminders are thus part of the government’s current childcare and education strategy, which recognises the early years as a key developmental stage and sees the potential of high-quality early years experiences to ‘narrow the gap’ in attainment between the highest and lowest achieving children.

Prior to the late 1990s, childminding had always been the largest provider of full day childcare outside the home for young children. Recent data, however, indicate that the number of young children in full-time centre-based provision has far surpassed the number of children in childminders’ care and that there has been a sizable decline in the number of registered childminders over the past several years (although recent registrations statistics indicated that this decline has ceased in 2011). Childminders have thus lost their preeminent position in England’s childcare market. Yet, many early years advocates would attest to the value of having childminders in the mix given their unique offer of care within a home environment. Given the dearth of research, though, this claim remains unconfirmed.

The present study aimed to fill some of the gaps in existing knowledge on childminders in England to try to better understand their place in the current childcare market, notably:

- The key elements of childminding practice
- Childminders’ views and understanding of children’s learning and development and how their practice supports this
- Childminders’ views of the EYFS.

This report presents the findings from an 18-month study of childminders in England that included a survey with a random sample of 581 childminders, interviews and observations with 25 childminders and interviews with 20 parents who use childminders.

The survey findings cover basic information about childminders’ practice, motivations for becoming a childminder, attitudes about childcare quality, their commitment to childminding and job satisfaction, their understanding of the EYFS and the support they receive, among other information. The findings from the interviews and observations go into more depth on childminding practice including childminders’ beliefs about providing care and learning (and any tensions between the two), the way that they structure a typical day, diversity in childminding practice (focusing in particular on differences in observed quality based on the observation data) and their views of the EYFS and how it has affected their practice.
The key findings are briefly reviewed below. First the survey findings are
summarised, followed by a synopsis of the findings from the interviews and
observations.

Survey results

The findings described below are based on analysis of the survey data from 581
childminders.

- Most childminders who completed the survey were female and in their
  mid-40s, on average. More than half were qualified to at least Level 3
  (53.2 per cent). More than 70 per cent of childminders had a childcare-
  specific qualification (70.5 per cent). Yet, 12 per cent of the sample had no
  qualification.

- Childminders were registered to provide care to at least five children at
  any one time, on average, and most were registered to provide care from
  infancy. At the time of the survey, most childminders were caring for
toddlers and preschoolers, and childminders cared for 2-3 different age
groups of children, on average. Childminders cared for a relatively diverse
group of children in terms of their ethnicity, but few cared for disabled
children.

- Childminders tended to work full-time and many worked long hours (i.e.
  more than 40 hours per week) or extended hours (i.e. early opening).
  Childminders tended to take a maximum of 4 weeks annual leave.

- Childminders found many typical aspects of childcare quality important,
  particularly providing a safe, loving and stimulating environment for
  children where their individual needs are met. Although still relatively
  important, childminders were less likely to view qualifications and training
  and teaching of religious or cultural values of primary importance for
  overall quality.

- Childminders engaged in a mix of activities with children including reading,
counting and physical activities. Yet, they also seemed to value children’s
  free time with all but 4 per cent of childminders indicating that children
  had at least an hour daily for free play. Most childminders incorporated
  community resources such as parks, libraries and playgroups into their
care.

- Most childminders chose their profession so they could be home with their
  own children while working or because they wanted to work with children.
The majority of childminders in our sample had no immediate intentions to
stop their work and were largely satisfied with their jobs. Childminders
tended to be least satisfied with the job security and monetary aspects of
their work.

- Childminders tended to involve parents in their care in a variety of ways,
  notably sharing information about children and supporting children’s
  learning at home. Childminders were able to identify some tensions in
  working with parents including timekeeping, late payments and a general
  sense of being taken for granted.
Childminders were members of a variety of organisations, most notably National Childminding Association (NCMA). About half of our sample reported being in a NCMA or local authority coordinated network. Childminders sought support primarily from other childminders and local authority advisors and were generally pleased with the level of support they received.

More than 80 per cent of childminders were very or fairly knowledgeable about the EYFS, and learned about it through their local authorities and other childminders, as well as their own research. The aspects of the EYFS that childminders liked the most were that it provides guidance and a common framework for providers, enables monitoring and assessment of children and is child-centred. The degree of paperwork and the time involved in fulfilling its requirements were the main challenges of the EYFS identified by childminders.

Childminding clusters

The second stage of the survey analysis was to determine whether childminders in England fit into groups or ‘clusters’ based on some of their key background and practice-related characteristics. A summary of the findings is provided below.

- Results from cluster analysis revealed that childminders fit into four clusters based on their key background and practice-related characteristics including highest qualification level and whether childminder holds any childcare specific qualifications or training, network membership, whether childminder cares for disabled children or children with special educational needs (SEN), ethnicity, number of years in practice, knowledge of the EYFS and likelihood of practicing in the future.

- Childminders in the first cluster (C1) were highly networked and qualified and knowledgeable of the EYFS. Further analyses revealed that they were also the most positive about the EYFS, particularly in terms of it providing a common framework for providers and its child-centred focus. In addition to being qualified and knowledgeable of the EYFS, childminders in the second cluster (C2) were ethnically diverse and tended to care for disabled/SEN children. Childminders in the third cluster (C3) were not members of networks and were moderately qualified. Finally, childminders in the fourth cluster (C4) had been in the profession for a long time and had the lowest knowledge of the EYFS, lowest qualifications and were not very likely to be networked.

- Childminders were more similar than different regardless of cluster membership. That is, although they differed on the variables that composed the clusters, childminders in the different clusters were not radically different in terms of their working hours, the activities they provided for children in their care, their attitudes and beliefs about childcare and their general job satisfaction.
Childminders’ beliefs about their practice

The findings summarised below focus on data from the interviews with childminders.

- The choice to become a childminder often evolved out of personal caring responsibilities, but the choice to remain tended to focus on the love of the job and the feeling of making an impact in the lives of children and families.

- A close, trusting relationship between childminders and children was the core upon which good childminding was built, although most childminders saw their role as distinct from that of a parent.

- Childminders very much saw their homes as a contrast to the ‘busy, noisy’ nursery environment and, thus, more appropriate for young children.

- Childminders’ ethos of learning revolved around tailored provision, the use of child-directed free play and some planned activities.

- Childminders felt strongly that young children could not – and would not – learn in an environment devoid of caring. Some childminders, but not all, saw preparing children for nursery or school as an important part of their jobs. Even among these childminders, it was still perceived as crucially important to allow children to have a voice in what they learned and how they learned it.

Routines and activities

In interviews, childminders were asked to describe a ‘typical’ day. Routines and activities were featured in these discussions.

- Routines dictated the schedule that childminders followed in terms of when and what type of activities they offered, as well as the timing of other routines, such as naps and mealtimes. Childminders relied upon using community resources, such as parks and play groups to support their delivery of childcare.

- The mix of activities and outings offered by childminders was one of the reasons parents selected childminders for their childcare needs rather than centre-based care.

Diversity in childminding practice

While the analysis of the childminding clusters did not reveal significant variability between childminders based on the data collected from the survey, the more detailed data from the interviews and observations pointed to the ways in which childminders’ practice varied between individuals. We briefly highlight these findings below.

- The largest variation in practice focused around childminders’ provision of learning opportunities for children.

- When planning activities for children, childminders familiarised themselves with children’s needs and interests and worked with children to plan
activities. To facilitate children’s learning, some childminders planned in advance learning activities on a regular basis, whereas others preferred primarily to provide ideas for play to children and enabled children to learn ‘on the go’ through guided free play. Both groups reported being very flexible in their approach and were ready to adapt to changing circumstances in children’s needs and interests. A third small group of childminders saw themselves only as carers rather than also as learning providers and generally offered unguided free play where guidance or interaction from the childminders was minimal.

- The observation data revealed that most childminders tailored their provision to individual children’s needs and interests. Some childminders were able to sustain the individualised approach throughout the day, whereas others occasionally restricted children’s activities and imagination and, thus, provided inconsistent or, in some cases, minimal facilitation of children’s learning through play.

- Childminders were more similar than different to one another when it came to emotional interaction, supervision and discipline and, on the whole, seemed to provide high-quality care.

- In terms of participation in activities, some childminders participated in activities with children all the time, whereas others participated less often and, therefore, were more likely to miss opportunities for enabling children’s learning.

- Our observations showed that there was a large variation in specific learning opportunities provided by childminders. Some childminders consistently provided activities for learning and structured children’s play to support and extend their learning, whereas others were less likely to do so. By and large, childminders were aware of the kind of learning opportunities that should be provided to children to promote their development and learning; however, some childminders were more successful in putting these ideas into practice than others.

- Regular reflection and a willingness to improve their practice were important aspects of practice among childminders who offered consistent high-quality childcare. Advance planning appeared to be important to ensure children were offered adequate opportunities for learning, particularly when childminders had large groups of children. ‘On the spot’ planning could also be effective, but perhaps worked better with smaller groups.

**Childminding and the EYFS**

Childminders were also asked about their views and experiences of the EYFS during interviews. These findings aligned with and expanded upon the survey findings.

- Overall, childminders felt quite favourably about the EYFS, as they felt it put them on par with other early years professionals and helped them improve (or, at least, reinforced) their practice.

- Due to initial lack of clarity and support, the EYFS was a difficult framework to implement for childminders. Even after a period of
adaptation, some childminders still believed that the framework needed to be simplified and that the paperwork used to capture children’s developmental progress should be standardised.

- Even though most childminders appreciated the usefulness of assessing children’s progress in order to facilitate children’s learning and development, some still struggled with recording children’s progress and were unsure whether they were doing it correctly.

- Information sharing on children’s progress on the EYFS learning goals between childminders and other early years providers did not occur unless childminders already had a good working relationship with local nurseries or preschools. Childminders felt that other early years professionals had a negative perception of childminders and were reluctant to share pertinent information about children with childminders.

Conclusion

Caring and learning were essential to childminders and, indeed, were interdependent, as childminders did not think learning was possible in the absence of a safe, caring environment. Flexibility – both in terms of their planning and working patterns – was also a cornerstone of childminding practice. This entailed adapting to the changing needs and interests of children, but also providing a service that helped working parents with their childcare requirements. In terms of the EYFS, childminders felt that it reinforced some of their good practice and it helped to tighten the links between childminders’ planning and children’s development. It was less clear whether the EYFS has helped to improve the public image of childminding and childminders’ joint working with other early years providers.

Based on the whole of the survey and qualitative findings, there appeared to be several key elements of effective childminding practice. These elements were reported by childminders in the surveys and interviews, but perhaps more importantly, were also observed in high-quality childminding homes. The elements included:

- Sustaining caring, consistent one-to-one relationships with children
- Tailoring provision to children’s interests and needs
- Maintaining flexibility to be responsive to children’s interests and needs
- Embedding learning in play
- Extending child-directed play
- Using community resources
- Being willing to reflect and change practice.

Ultimately, the key to effective childminding practice was childminders’ ability to make learning part of a caring, close relationship.
1. Introduction

Historically, childcare in England has been largely fragmented and essentially viewed as a private matter for families. When the Labour government was elected into power in 1997, the government began to take a more involved role in childcare policy and provision. This change was due to many years of active campaigning by childcare organisations and individuals who disseminated emerging evidence that high-quality childcare was favorably linked to young children’s development. For politicians and policymakers there was also a recognition of its potential role in reducing child poverty and disadvantage by enabling single parents (particularly mothers) to enter paid employment (Bertram & Pascal, 1999; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2006). Further at this time, the division between childcare (for working parents) and early education (e.g. part-time nursery school) began to diminish and these services for young children were viewed as complementary components of early years provision.

1.1 The introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in England

The first national English childcare strategy was introduced in 1998 and established the principle that, while it is up to parents to decide if and what type of childcare they want to use, it is the government’s responsibility to ensure that parents have access to services that enable them to make genuine choices by improving the quality, the accessibility and the affordability of childcare services (Bertram & Pascal, 1999). Initiatives introduced in England since the late 1990s have all aimed to deal with these improvements. Relating to childcare quality, the early years from birth to 5 years began to be viewed as a core educational stage in its own right with defined key areas of learning and progression for young children.¹

Since 2008, early years practitioners working with young children from birth to age 5 years have followed the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which is the first statutory (i.e. mandatory) framework for early years providers. The EYFS sets the standards for young children’s learning, development and care focusing on six key areas:

1. Personal, social and emotional development
2. Communication, language and literacy
3. Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy
4. Knowledge and understanding of the world
5. Physical development

¹In England, there are six educational stages for children from birth to 18 years of age. The stages set the expected educational knowledge for children within each stage and include achievement targets and curriculum guidance. Children in England typically enter formal schooling at the age of 4 years.
6. Creative development (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008).²

The EYFS also includes guidance for practitioners to support young children’s development and learning including how they can help families facilitate children’s development. The EYFS is based on an underpinning belief in the importance of play as the foundation for young children’s learning.

Children’s development at age 5 years is assessed by early years providers using the EYFS Profile, a mandatory summary assessment tool comprising 13 scales covering the six areas of learning and development. Each scale has nine points for which children’s development must be demonstrated and an overall score depicting where on the nine point spectrum children ultimately fall: the first three points are ascribed to children who are still progressing toward the desired level of development for the scale, the next five points are assigned to children who are achieving at the targeted level, and the final point describes children who have surpassed the expected development in that particular area. Children who score six points or higher on a particular scale are classified as ‘working securely’ within that area of development, and children who score a total of 78 points or more across the 13 scales are deemed to be at a ‘good level of development’ overall.

Providers must supply written evidence of children’s achievement pertaining to each point up to the highest point that they have achieved, and they are encouraged to keep portfolios documenting their observations and evidence of children’s progression towards the learning goals. When one child has had several providers over the course of the first 5 years, the providers are encouraged to synthesise their evidence and data to complete the Profile.

Discretion is left to local authorities to determine the exact nature and depth of evidence that needs to be provided to substantiate the Profile scores, although all providers must attend moderation sessions at least once annually where they work with trained moderators to ensure accurate completion of the Profile. The EYFS Profile results are submitted to the providers’ local authorities and are published annually (at the local authority level) to enable the government to track young children’s development and progression upon school entry and, indirectly, hold early years providers accountable for developing the children in their care. In addition, all early years providers are inspected against the EYFS framework by Ofsted as a way of regulating quality provision. The EYFS framework is currently under review with two reports released in 2011, and some changes to be introduced in 2012 (Department for Education, 2011; Tickell, 2011).

1.2 Childminders in England

In England, home-based childcare providers are known as childminders. ‘Early years’ childminders caring for children from birth to 5 years must register on the Early Years Register, deliver the EYFS, have their homes inspected by

²The EYFS also sets out the ‘welfare’ requirements for early years providers, which focus on health and safety.
Ofsted to ensure they are safe and suitable for young children and contribute to children’s Profile scores. To date, there is no qualification requirement for childminders, unless they are members of accredited networks\(^3\), in which case they must be working towards a Level 3 qualification. As regulated early years providers, childminders are thus part of the government’s current early years strategy, which recognizes birth to 5 years as a key developmental stage and sees the potential of high-quality early years experiences to ‘narrow the gap’ in attainment between the highest and lowest achieving children.

From the time statistics on registered childminders became available (in the late 1940s) until 1997, the number of childminders in England continued to grow. Between 1989 and 1997, however, the number of centre-based providers tripled (Department for Education and Employment, 1999), and, at the same time, the government’s national childcare strategy supported the provision of large numbers of new centre-based places together with subsidies through the tax and benefits system for parents to take up the places (Bertram & Pascal, 1999). Registration statistics indicated an approximate 20 per cent decline in the number of registered childminders from 2003 until 2010, although recent statistics revealed a slight increase in the number of registered childminders in 2011.\(^4\) Even with this increase in numbers of registered childminders, the number of centre-based places for young children far surpasses the number of childminders’ places (i.e. 1,024,519 vs. 282,512, respectively, in September 2011), and since 1999 (when childcare use by parents began being regularly monitored), the use of childminders has been fairly stable and low (i.e. 4-5 per cent) (Smith, et al., 2010). While childminding had historically been the largest provider of full-time childcare outside the home for young children, they appear to have lost their preeminent position in England’s childcare market (Owen & Fauth, 2010).

### 1.3 Research on childminding

Even with the increases in centre-based places, registered places with childminders still represent more than 20 per cent of the English childcare market in terms of numbers of registered places. Yet, there is very little recent (or, indeed, past) robust research on childminders and their practice. The primary study of childcare in the UK, the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) and its related follow-up studies (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004, 2008), which provided much of the evidence used by policymakers on the benefits of high-quality early years provision on children’s concurrent and future development, did not include childminders except in a small qualitative substudy described below (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002).

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\(^3\) A childminding network is made up of a group of registered childminders who are supported by a network coordinator who is employed to manage the network, (usually by a local authority).

Limited though it is, research on childminders in Britain first appeared in the late 1960s. This early research generally comprised small-scale local studies. Reviews of this research suggest that the findings were not very consistent, although the general tone was that childminders offered low-quality care to deprived children, were largely unregulated and unqualified and worked in isolation with little access to support (for a review, see Moss, 1987). It was not until the 1990s that a systematic study of English childminders commenced (Mooney, Knight, Moss, & Owen, 2001). Using a mix of surveys, case studies and secondary data analysis, the findings revealed that two-thirds of childminders reported that they chose their profession as a means of earning money while being home with their own children. Yet, more than half viewed childminding as a long-term career. Regardless of their motivation, most childminders viewed themselves as professional childcare workers, even if they did not attend training courses or obtain specialist qualifications. Further, although working conditions were poor in terms of pay and benefits, as well as the societal value placed on childminding as a profession, childminders felt quite satisfied with their work. Relative to some of the older studies, this study dug more deeply into the motivations and perceptions of childminders and revealed a fairly positive picture despite low pay and low (perceived) value. A small qualitative study of the practices of ‘highly effective’ childminders who were nominated for participation by their local authorities (Siraj-Blatchford, et al., 2002) found that, even among these high-quality childminders, few had substantial knowledge of the early years curriculum guidance being used at the time (the Foundation Stage, which has since been replaced by the EYFS), and of those who were aware of it, many felt that it was too formal and would require excessive planning. In the study, childminders cited children’s access to mixed age groups and a consistent caregiver as key advantages of their provision relative to other types of childcare. This study called for further research on childminders including a more diverse sample and a greater focus on interactions between childminders and children.

The most recent English research on childminding has focused on early years provision more broadly with childminders included as one type of provider. The Families, Children and Child Care (FCCC) study is a comparative study of the influence of childcare on young children in the UK. Early evidence from the FCCC study revealed that childminders were more emotionally responsive than centre-based providers when children were 10 and 18 months (Leach, Barnes, Malmberg, Sylva, & Stein, 2008). Yet, a later study reported that neither provider type nor quality had an influence on children’s externalizing behavior problems at 36 months (Barnes, et al., 2010). Thus, this work has yet to elucidate any differential influences on children’s well-being due to attendance at one type of provision over another.

Finally, the English government funds two ongoing time series surveys: the first sampling childcare and early years providers (Brind, et al., 2011) and the second, parents – who may or may not use such provision (Speight, et al., 2009). Both surveys help to build a profile of early years provision and providers in England and monitor the progress of childcare and early years policy, particularly vis-à-vis affordability and accessibility. Data from these

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5See www.familieschildrencare.org for more information.
surveys have revealed that relative to other types of providers, a higher percentage of childminders had no educational qualifications (i.e. 8 per cent overall vs. 22 per cent of childminders) and were less likely to care for disadvantaged or ethnic minority children (Brind, et al., 2011); this latter finding is a departure from the older research on childminders in Britain who largely cared for low-income, ethnic minority children (Moss, 1987). The surveys also revealed that parents tended to choose childminders for reasons of ‘trust’ and the nature of the care provided, rather than for educational reasons, the latter of which was common among parents who used centre-based care (Speight, et al., 2009).

Overall then, there is very little substantive research on childminders in England. They have lost their foothold as they key providers of full-time daycare for young children. Further, since 2008, childminding has become increasingly regulated as childminders are now mandated to work within the EYFS framework and are held accountable to the same standards as centre-based providers, which may change the nature of their work. Yet, the evidence to date says very little about childminding practice, notably how childminders use their unique position as home-based providers to help young children achieve appropriate development prior to school entry. The EYFS is quite clear on which outcomes are deemed important for young children, yet it does not dictate how early years providers help children achieve acceptable levels of the outcomes.

1.4 The present study

This report presents the findings from an 18-month study of childminders in England that included a survey with a random sample of 581 childminders in England, in depth interviews and semi-structured observations with 25 childminders in five local authorities and telephone interviews with 20 parents who used the childminders interviewed for the present study.

The present study aimed to fill some of the gaps in existing knowledge on childminders in England to try to better understand their place in the current childcare market, notably:

- The key elements of childminding practice
- Childminders’ views and understanding of children’s learning and development and how their practice supports this
- Childminders’ views of the EYFS.

Given these gaps, the overall aim of the study was to better understand the core features of childminding practice for young children and how they are defined and described by childminders themselves. The survey findings capture information and views from a large sample of childminders to build on the demographic picture of childminders established in previous surveys with information on their practice, motivations for becoming a childminder, attitudes about childcare quality, their commitment to childminding and job satisfaction, their understanding of the EYFS and the support they receive, among other information. The findings from the interviews and observations go into more depth on childminding practice including childminders’ beliefs about providing care and learning (and the relationship, as well as any tensions, between the
two), the way that they structure a typical day, diversity in childminding practice (focusing in particular on observed quality) and their views of the EYFS and how it has affected their practice (particularly vis-à-vis the learning goals). The report concludes with an overall summary and implications of the findings.
2. Methods

2.1 Design

The starting point for the research was the survey, given that it enabled collection of information from a wide range of childminders, which helped to inform (and provide a ready sample for) the more in-depth qualitative elements of the study (i.e. childminder interviews and observations and parent interviews). The design for the survey and qualitative studies, in turn, are described below.

2.1.1 Survey design

The survey included a clustered sample of childminders living in five local authority areas including Cambridgeshire, Camden, Doncaster, Hampshire and Leicester, which were the sites selected for the qualitative components of the study. The local authorities were chosen in consultation between NCB and the National Childminding Association (NCMA) to ensure that we had both rural and urban areas, areas with high and low deprivation and areas with strong and weak childminding networks and links to NCMA support.

The survey also included a sample of childminders living in the ‘rest of England’ (i.e. outside of the five local authorities). This was a clustered sample of childminders residing in 90 different postcode districts in England selected with probability proportionate to size, where size was defined as the number of childminders practicing within a 2-mile radius of the district. Selecting the sample proportionate to size ensures that the sample included a mix of childminders living in rural and urban settings across England.

For the most part, both samples were drawn from the (now defunct) Childcare Finder website, which collated information on childcare providers from individual local authority’s Family Information Service (FIS). Childcare Finder enabled searches of particular types of providers (i.e. in the present study, childminders were specified) within a selected distance to a particular local authority or postcode district. Two miles was chosen as it seemed a sensible distance to ensure that all childminders practicing within the various local authorities and postcode districts would have at least one chance of selection. In two local authorities (Camden and Doncaster) the local FIS provided the full list of childminders.

After retrieving the complete list of registered childminders in each of the five local authorities, 60 childminders (plus 20 reserves) per local authority were randomly selected to participate in the survey.

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6A full postcode is known as a ‘postcode unit’ and usually corresponds to a limited number of addresses or a single large delivery point. The first part of the postcode unit is known as a ‘postcode district’. There were 2,321 postcode districts in England at the time sampling took place.
Postcode districts were sampled to obtain the random sample from the ‘rest of England’, which was to include 10 childminders from 90 different postcode districts selected with probability proportional to size. There are over 2,000 postcode districts in England and, ideally, data on the number of childminders within each of these postcode districts would have been available to select the 90 postcode districts. As the number of childminders was not readily available and would have required manually looking up each postcode district in England and counting the number of childminders, the approach was slightly simplified. In the first step, 450 districts were randomly selected, and size (i.e. the number of childminders) was determined. From this list of 450, 90 postcode districts were selected proportional to size, and subsequently 10 childminders (plus 3 reserves) were randomly selected from each postcode district.

The combined approach elicited a total sampling frame of 1,200 childminders; 1,043 after discarding duplicates (i.e. childminders that appeared in more than one postcode district). Eligibility to participate in the study was limited to registered childminders who were either currently practicing or had practiced in the past year. Four per cent of the childminders contacted were deemed ineligible giving us a final sampling frame of 1,002. The expected response rate was approximately 50 per cent (i.e. approximately 500 responses) based on the response rate from the government funded study of childcare and early years providers (Phillips, Norden, McGinigal, & Cooper, 2009b).

We had initially envisaged sending the survey by email or post (described in the Measures section below). However, only 59 per cent of the contacts had email addresses and very few had full postal addresses. Nearly all childminders had telephone numbers, however, and a telephone survey was conducted alongside the web survey. A postal version of the survey was created for the childminders for which only postal details were available ($n=55$). All childminders with email addresses were first sent the web version of the survey, while childminders without email addresses were phoned. After several reminders, childminders who did not respond to the web survey were transferred to the telephone sample. Participating childminders were eligible for a lottery draw of 50 £15 high street vouchers.

This entire sampling process commenced in January 2010 and took approximately 6 months.

2.1.2 Qualitative design

The clustered sample of childminders living in the five local authority areas including Cambridgeshire, Camden, Doncaster, Hampshire and Leicester, were the sites selected for the qualitative components of the study. A total sampling frame of 285 childminders from the five local authorities were eligible to

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2 This is one weakness of the design as, in principle, each childminder should have a known (and equal) probability of selection. As there was no a priori method of revealing how many childminders appear within a 2-mile radius of more than one district, some childminders had multiple chances of selection and others just one. This approach suggests that the sample has a slight bias towards dense urban areas where postcode districts cover a geographically small area.
participate in the study. From this eligible sample, 137 childminders participated in the survey (48.1 per cent response).

A purposive sample of five childminders was selected from each case study area\(^8\) using primary and secondary criteria from the survey data (i.e. respondents were chosen on the basis of their characteristics using the criteria and are not meant to be representative of the survey sample as a whole). The primary criteria, selected given their likely importance in influencing the findings included:

- The level of deprivation in the local authority where they lived (most deprived third vs. middle third vs. least deprived third based on ranking scores)\(^9\)
- Number of years in practice (5 years or fewer vs. more than 5 years)
- Qualification level (no/basic qualifications vs. Level 3 qualification or higher)
- Reported knowledge of the EYFS (know it well or a fair amount vs. know it a little or not heard of it).

The secondary criteria were used to ensure variability in the sample including whether the childminder was a member of a childminding network, ethnicity (White vs. non-White), whether the childminder looked after any disabled and/or special needs children, and whether childminder provided out-of-hours care (i.e., early mornings, evenings, or overnight). All sampled childminders were female.

The interviews were conducted at a suitable time for the childminder, ideally when they were not looking after children. Interviews were digitally recorded with participants’ permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The observations were conducted at a time that reflected a ‘typical’ day for the childminder including the mix of children enrolled, and the usual schedule followed. Observations focused on the practice of the childminder and not individual children per se. Therefore, parents were not contacted for consent; however, some childminders requested additional information that they could send to their parents to inform them about the upcoming observation. Interviews were generally completed prior to observations to allow the researcher to explain the observation process and for childminders to ask any questions. The interviews and observations were completed by different researchers to prevent any researcher bias during the observations.

Originally, focus groups were to be conducted with parents in each of the case study areas. However, upon reflection and discussions with the advisory

\(^8\)The London Borough of Camden only provided the childminders’ registration numbers, not full contact details. We thus had to liaise with the Camden FIS directly to contact childminders for participation in the study, which resulted in a poor survey response rate. As such, childminders living in London from the England-wide sample were also sampled for the qualitative study.

\(^9\)Assessment of area deprivation (appended to the survey data) was based on the English Index of Multiple Deprivation (http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/research/indicesdeprivation/deprivation 10/).
group, it was decided that shorter telephone interviews would be conducted. It was agreed that this approach would not compromise the quality of data collected and it was logistically simpler for the research team. Most importantly, the telephone interviews enabled parents’ participation as they could be arranged at a convenient time.

Childminders who had completed both the interviews and observations were contacted and asked to pass information about the interviews on to their parents. Eligible parents needed to be using a childminder for all or part of their childcare needs for at least one child aged under 5 years at the time of the telephone interview. A maximum of three parents could be contacted from one childminder to ensure a varied sample. The parents who were interviewed were sampled from 13 different childminders. Interviews were completed over the phone, were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.2 Sample

2.2.1 Survey response rates

Of the 1,002 childminders in the sampling frame, 581 responded to the survey, a 58 per cent response. Exploring in more detail reasons for non-response, of the 421 childminders who did not respond to the survey, 19 per cent were outright refusals (n=79). The reserve sample was not used. Non-response was spread fairly evenly across the telephone and web samples, but was relatively high for the postal sample (i.e. 10 completes out of 55; 18 per cent response).

In terms of mode of completion for the 581 childminders who responded to the survey, Table 2.1 presents the breakdown by original and final mode of completion.

Table 2.1 Original and final mode of completion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed on web</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred to telephone sample</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred to postal sample</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Very little data were available on the childminders who did not respond to the survey, but non-response by government office region and rural/urban classification was examined and no statistically significant differences were found. No further adjustments for non-response were carried out.

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10The study advisory group, which comprised representatives from across the early years sector including the Department for Education (DfE), Ofsted, NCMA, academic and practice experts and childminders, met quarterly throughout the study.
2.2.2 Sampling weights

Given the complex sampling strategy, sampling weights were created to adjust for the unequal probabilities of selection for each childminder in the sampling frame. First, the probability of selection for childminders from each of the five local authorities was calculated, which was a straightforward simple random sample (within each local authority). Second, the probability of selection for the ‘rest of England’ sample was calculated in three stages:

- Stage 1: probability of selecting the 450 postcode districts
- Stage 2: probability of selecting the 90 postcode districts (with probability proportional to size)
- Stage 3: probability of selecting each childminder within each of the 90 postcode districts.

Further details on the sampling calculations are available from the authors upon request. All data presented in the Results section are adjusted by the sampling weights and all figures are presented to one decimal point for precision.

2.2.3 Survey sample description

A more in-depth view of childminders’ socio-demographic profile is presented in the Results section, but a very basic sample description is provided here. The survey sample comprised primarily women (98.0 per cent) who were in their early 40s, on average. More than one-fifth was Black and Minority Ethnic (BME).

Table 2.2 Sample by government office region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; the Humber</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=581, unweighted data. Region is actual region of residence, not region used for sampling purposes.

As shown in Table 2.2, more than half of the sample was from the London boroughs, East of England and the South East (59.2 per cent). Few childminders from the South West and the North East were represented in the survey, likely due to the fact that none of the five local authorities chosen for the clustered sample were in these regions.
2.2.4 Qualitative childminder sample description

To obtain the 25 interviews and observations (five in each local authority), 11 61 childminders were approached to take part in the research. Of the 61 childminders initially invited to participate, 10 were deemed ineligible because they were no longer practicing or they looked after older children only. Of the 51 eligible to participate, 14 declined to participate, and the researchers were unable to make contact with the remaining 12 childminders. Once a childminder was found to be ineligible or declined to take part in the study, an alternate childminder with the same primary characteristics was sampled for inclusion in the interviews. If no suitable match was found then the nearest possible match to the primary criteria was selected.

Descriptive analyses (i.e. Chi-squares based on survey data) were run between childminders who participated in the interviews and those that declined or were not contacted to check for any significant differences between the two based on the primary and secondary selection criteria and inspection ratings. As seen in Table 2.3, no statistically significant differences were observed between childminders who participated in the interviews and those that declined on area deprivation, number of years in practice, ethnicity, working hours and inspection ratings. Childminders who participated in the interviews were more likely than those that declined to have a Level 3 qualification or above, be knowledgeable of the EYFS, be a member of a childminding network, and look after disabled and/or special needs children. Thus, our qualitative sample may be slightly biased towards more educated and networked childminders. As the aim of the sampling was to garner a diverse sample of childminders, and not necessarily a representative one, these differences are acceptable.

Table 2.3: Differences between interview participants and non-participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary criteria</th>
<th>Interviewed (N=25)</th>
<th>Not interviewed (declined/not contacted) (N=26)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area deprivation (per cent reside in most deprived third of local authorities)</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years in practice (per cent six years or more)</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification level (per cent Level 3 or above)*</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of EYFS (per cent knows it well/a fair amount)**</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 Two observations were not completed due to one childminder ceasing to practice and inability to make contact with the other (N=23 observations).

12 Childminders are inspected within 7 months of registration and at least once every 4 years after the initial inspection by Ofsted. Inspection ratings, ranging from 1=‘outstanding’ to 4=‘inadequate’, are publicly available.
### Secondary criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Childminding networks (per cent members)**</th>
<th>Ethnicity (per cent White)</th>
<th>Disabled/special needs children (per cent care for disabled/special needs children)*</th>
<th>Out-of-hours care (per cent provide early morning, late evening, or overnight care)</th>
<th>Inspection ratings (per cent good/outstanding rating)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences in percentages assessed via $\chi^2$; *$p<.05$ and **$p<.01$.

Indeed, data from the interviews affirmed the diversity of the sample. While all of the childminders were female, some had been practicing for as little as 2 years and others more than 20 years. The childminders looked after a wide age range of children (range=4 months to 14 years), with some only looking after children under 5 years of age exclusively. Several childminders were accredited by their local authorities so they could offer free early education, which is a legal entitlement for all 3- to-4-year-olds for 15 hours per week (and primarily offered in centres). Childminders in the sample offered a variety of services including respite care and overnight and weekend care, and some worked part-time. Some childminders worked alone and others with assistants or their husbands (who were either also registered childminders or assistants).

### 2.2.5 Parent sample description

Twenty parents who used childminders interviewed for the present study participated in telephone interviews. The sample comprised three parents from London, four parents each from Cambridgeshire, Doncaster and Hampshire and five parents from Leicester. Of those interviewed, 15 were mothers and five were fathers. There was also a mix of professional backgrounds. Only five used childminders exclusively for their childcare needs, seven used a mix of childminders and centre-based care, five used childminders and family members and three used a mix of all three for their childcare needs.

### 2.3 Measures

#### 2.3.1 Survey

Our data are based on a 25 minute survey that we developed and piloted. Survey development was based on the existing evidence base as well as the key gaps in our knowledge. Most questions in the survey were based on similar questions used in other childminding and early years providers studies including the TCRU childminding study from the late 1990s (Mooney, et al., 2001), the Childcare and Early Years Provider surveys (Nicholson, Jordan, Cooper, & Mason, 2008; Phillips, Norden, McGinigal, & Cooper, 2009a; Phillips, Norden, McGinigal, Oseman, & Coleman, 2010) and the National Study of Child Care for Low-Income Families (Layzar & Goodson, 2007). Questions about provision of quality care were derived from a US study from the Families and Work Institute (Galinsky, Howes, Kontos, & Shinn, 1994), and the items on childminders’
views on caregiving were taken from the *Parental Modernity Scale*, which is a 30-item measure examining traditional, authoritarian parental beliefs and progressive, democratic beliefs (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985). We only included eight questions related to progressive beliefs. This measure has been used in other studies of childcare. Questions on how childminders engage with parents in order to support children’s learning and development were derived from the work of the Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL) project (Wheeler & Connor, 2008). Items pertaining to the EYFS were developed in consultation with our advisory group.

During the development of the survey, various drafts of the survey were sent to the project team, experts and the advisory group for comments.

The main sections of the survey include:

- About the service
- Definition and provision of quality care
- Activities with children
- Relationship with parents
- Commitment to childminding and job satisfaction
- Membership of childminding networks and sources of support
- Knowledge and attitudes towards regulations and EYFS
- Background and demographic information.

We conducted two main pilots of the survey with 15 London-based childminders. For both pilots, we gathered together a group of childminders who went through the survey (in whole or in part), examined their responses, discussed their perceived meaning of the items and commented on any clarifications or additions needed. Feedback from the pilots was carefully documented and discussed by the project team. We subsequently conducted a further pilot of the final version of the survey using live sample to ensure that the first several responses did not result in any major errors or problems.

Following these piloting activities, the survey officially started in May 2010 and was in the field for 9 weeks to the end of June.

The full survey is available in Appendix A.

### 2.3.2 Qualitative measures

**Childminder interview schedule and observation instrument**

Both the interview schedule and observation instrument were designed by researchers at NCB. They were piloted with childminders and the advisory group. All childminders were interviewed in their homes. The 1.5-2 hour interviews were semi-structured, which enabled the interviewers to collect comparable information across all childminders, while allowing for flexibility depending on childminders’ responses. The interviews were conducted by three researchers, each following a topic guide that was created based on the survey data (i.e. areas that needed more in-depth exploration) and key gaps in the

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13One childminder opted to be interviewed during a community playgroup.
existing evidence base. The topic guide included topics and subtopics and prompts for the interviewers, but left the specific line and ordering of questioning to the discretion of the interviewers. The topic guide is included in Appendix B. The topic guide included the following main topics for discussion:

- Descriptions of their practice
- Perceptions of what ‘quality’ childcare is and what they do to provide quality childcare
- Views on how children learn and develop
- Experience and views of the EYFS.

The interview topic guide was piloted after five interviews had been completed across two case study areas. Subsequently the topic guide was shortened by reducing the number of prompts under the practice and quality sections. The first five interview transcripts were read over by the project manager for quality control. Regular project team meetings were held throughout the interviewing process to ensure quality control and to highlight any areas that needed probing in subsequent interviews.

Initially, the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale – Revised (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2007) was going to be used for the observations, but in consultation with the advisory group it was decided that quantitative observations on such a small sample had a limited value relative to the training time to ensure all observers were reliable. Further, the main function of the FCCERS-R is to assess the childcare environment (and focuses heavily on health and safety) rather than the provider per se. As the aim of the present study was to focus on the practice of childminders specifically, it was deemed necessary to incorporate more about the relational aspects of the care and the relationship between the providers and the children in the observation instrument. Based on content from the FCCERS-R and several other published scales including the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Curricular Extension to the ECERS-R (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart), the Child Caregiver Interaction Scale (Carl, 2007), and the Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett, 1989), the final 1.5 to 2.5 hour observation focused on the following scales (and subscales):

- Space and furnishings
- Personal care routines (information sharing with parents; meals and snacks; health and safety)
- Cognitive development (cognitive stimulation; reading and literacy; counting, measuring, and shapes; science and nature)
- Materials and activities to learn and grow (fine motor materials, puzzles, and blocks; art, music, and drama; use of TV, video, and computer; active physical play)
- Interaction (supervision; childminder-child interaction; interactions between children)
- Programme structure (schedule; free play; group activities).

The observation was designed to be semi-structured such that each scale included examples of materials, resources, or behaviours to observe, but rather than allocating a score for each scale, observers wrote detailed descriptions of what they observed. Appendix C showcases the main scales, subscales and indicators used in the observation instrument. Space for basic information
about the practice (i.e. number and ages of children present, number of adults including assistants, opening hours, and the general schedule followed) and observers’ overall impressions of the home was also included in the observation instrument.

The project director trained the remaining three members of the research team on the observation instrument, which included four practice observations in childminders’ homes. Following the practice observations, the data were compared across observers and any major differences were discussed. By the time of the final practice observation, the research team was capturing comparable data. The practice observations also served as a pilot of the instrument, which was subsequently revised to clarify scales and/or combine scales that were capturing similar information, as well as to shorten the instrument.

**Parent interview schedule**

The 25 minute telephone interviews with parents were semi-structured, and the topic guide was developed by using the research questions, discussions with the advisory group and was informed by the childminder interviews (see Appendix D). Areas covered in the topic guide included:

- Background information about the parents in terms of their working patterns and number of children
- Background information about the childminding service that they receive
- Reasons for choosing a childminder
- Views on quality childcare
- Relationship with the childminder
- Knowledge and views of EYFS.

A similar process to the childminder topic guide was undertaken for piloting the parents’ topic guide. After three interviews had been completed the research team met to discuss any issues or problems with the topic guide and a revised simplified version of the guide was produced. The project manager read the first five transcripts to ensure quality control.

### 2.4 Analytic strategy

#### 2.4.1 Survey analytic strategy

Our analytic strategy is primarily descriptive, presenting percentages and averages for our sample on the various items included in the survey. All analyses incorporate our sample weights and account for the complex nature of our sampling method using the survey (svy) commands available in Stata software.\(^\text{14}\) Stata 9.2 and PASW 18 were used to analyse the data.

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\(^{14}\) The primary sampling unit (PSU) was specified as the individual childminder for childminders sampled from the five local authorities and the postcode district for the childminders from the ‘rest of England’. Strata were specified as the local authority for childminders sampled from the five local authorities and pairs of postcode districts.
The second stage of our analysis was to determine whether childminders in England fit into groups or ‘clusters’ based on some of their key background and practice-related characteristics. As such, we ran a series of exploratory cluster analyses. Cluster analysis is a data driven approach to analysis that identifies and groups together units – in this case, childminders – with similar responses on the relevant input variables by minimising ‘within-cluster’ differences and maximising ‘between-cluster’ differences. Identification of childminding clusters is a useful and novel way of classifying childminders to better understand the diversity within the profession today.

Specifically, we ran two-step cluster analyses specifying 3 to 6 cluster solutions (i.e. fitting the sample into 3, 4, 5 or 6 distinct clusters) including the following input variables:\(^\text{15}\):

- Whether childminder has any childcare specific qualifications or training
- Whether childminder is a member of NCMA or local authority childminding network
- Whether childminder cares for disabled children or children with SEN
- Ethnicity (White vs. non-White)
- Highest qualification level (range: 1=no qualifications to 6=Level 4 or 5)
- Number of years in practice
- Overall knowledge of the EYFS (range: 1=have never heard of it to 5=knew it very well)
- Likelihood of childminder practicing in the future (range: 1=very unlikely to 4=very likely).

Two-step cluster analysis was chosen because it can handle larger sample sizes, accommodates both categorical (i.e. ethnicity) and continuous variables (i.e. number of years in practice) simultaneously and enables easy transformation of variables that are measured on different scales (i.e. into z-scores). All cluster analyses were run in PASW 18 (formerly SPSS) using unweighted data.\(^\text{16}\) Our analyses revealed that a four cluster solution best fit the data, and 489 of the 581 (84.2 per cent) fit into one of the four clusters, with the remaining childminders classified as ‘outliers’ because they did not clearly fall into one of the four clusters. We thus explored any differences between childminders on a range of survey variables based on their cluster membership (excluding the outlier cases).

### 2.4.2 Qualitative analytic strategy

The qualitative interview and observation data were analysed thematically using Framework,\(^\text{17}\) a systematic method that allows in-depth thematic and within case (i.e. childminder) analysis. Initial broad themes were suggested by the research questions and the survey data. As further themes emerged, the index (ordered by size) for the childminders from the ‘rest of England’. For more information on the Stata survey commands, please see [http://www.stata.com/help.cgi?svy](http://www.stata.com/help.cgi?svy).

\(^{15}\)The input variables were selected based on expert opinion of key variables that differentiate childminders, as well as some initial analyses that revealed significant variation in these variables across childminders.

\(^{16}\)Weights are automatically turned off when running cluster commands in PASW.

\(^{17}\)See [http://www.framework-natcen.co.uk/](http://www.framework-natcen.co.uk/) for more information.
of key themes was revised and refined by the researchers. A matrix was drawn up for each theme, with the columns representing key subthemes and the rows representing data from individual childminders.

The final main themes included in the matrices were: background, key features of practice (from interviews and observations), role of the childminder, views on quality, how children learn, relationship with parents, EYFS and training and future plans. Data from each transcript was summarised in the appropriate matrix cell.

Information on the context, use of language, scaffolding and learning, working with mixed age groups, participation in activities and supervision, emotional interaction and behaviour management and discipline from the observations were also summarised in matrices.

The final matrices thus provided a full picture of each childminder’s views across the themes and subthemes, the range and variability of views between childminders and the results from the observations.

The same process was used for the parents’ interviews with the final themes including background, quality, relationships with childminders and the EYFS.18

After all of the data were summarised, each researcher read through the whole body of data to begin to identify and develop categories that described the full range of views, experiences, and behaviours represented and to understand possible links between different themes. The research team met as a group to discuss emerging themes and relationships. To help make the data more manageable, at the next stage of analysis central charts were created on two overall topics that appeared to be central to a greater understanding of childminding practice:

- The balance of care and learning in childminding homes and how childminders facilitate children’s learning
- Quality care focusing on childminders’ perceptions of quality and the observation data.

The central charts included simplified information pertaining to the relevant topics for each childminder to enable the researchers to elucidate the relationships between key themes, as well as to see if any childminders grouped together and whether these groups could be explained by any background characteristics (or other variables).

In addition to the central charts, the observation data were analysed further to assess the quality of care and learning provided by childminders. The descriptive explanations of good quality childcare from validated observation instruments (e.g. ECERS-R, ECERS-E) were used as guides for assessing the quality of childminding practice and were compared to examples documented in our observations.

18It should be noted that for this report the parent interview data were used primarily to provide further evidence for childminders’ views, rather than presented in any detail in of themselves.
3 Survey results

This section presents initial findings from the survey of childminders in England. All findings presented use weighted data. While the total number of childminders who responded to our survey is 581, some childminders chose not to respond to particular survey items and some items were not applicable to all respondents. Therefore, under each table we presented the total number of childminders (n) used as a base for calculating a specific finding.

3.1 Socio-demographic profile of childminders

3.1.1 Gender

Almost all childminders who responded to the survey were female (98.0 per cent).

3.1.2 Age

The average age of childminders was 44 years. Table 3.1 shows the age bands of childminders who responded to the survey, which indicates that most childminders are between 35 and 54 years old.

Table 3.1 Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age bands</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 and under</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and above</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=566

3.1.3 Ethnicity

As shown in Table 3.2, the majority of childminders were White (78.1 per cent).

Table 3.2 Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=575
The largest BME groups were Asian (which includes Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi; 9.0 per cent) and Black (African and Caribbean; 9.1 per cent).

### 3.1.4 Marital status

The majority ofchildminders (75.6 per cent) were married or in a civil partnership (see Table 3.3).

**Table 3.3 Marital status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with partner</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married /in a civil partnership</td>
<td>75.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/separated</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n=577*

### 3.1.5 Highest qualification level

More than a third of childminders (39.0 per cent) were qualified to a Level 3 and further 14.1 per cent had a Level 4 or 5 qualification. Childminders who are members of accredited networks must be working towards a Level 3 qualification. Almost 12 per cent of childminders had no qualification, 3.0 per cent an entry level qualification, about 9.7 per cent a Level 1 and a quarter Level 2 (see Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4 Highest qualification level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry level qualification</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4 and 5</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n=575*

### 3.1.6 Qualifications related to childcare

Childminders were also asked whether they had any qualification related to childcare. More than 70 per cent of childminders (70.5 per cent) had at least one of the qualifications. Among childminders, the most common qualification related to childcare was Certificate in Childminding Practice (CCP; 45.9 per cent). Although it is not a formally recognised qualification in and of itself, most childminders (68.4 per cent) took the Introduction to Childminding/ Childcare Practice (ICP) course. Fifteen per cent of childminders did not have any
qualification related to childcare or had not enrolled on the ICP. Table 3.5 presents most common qualifications related to childcare among childminders.

Table 3.5 Most common qualifications related to childcare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any qualification in childcare</td>
<td>70.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate in Childminding Practice (CCP)</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQ Level 3 in children’s care, learning and development</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CACHE Level 3 diploma in home-based childcare</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC national award, certificate, diploma in children’s care, learning and development – Level 3</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNEB certificate/diploma in nursery nursing</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Childminding/Childcare Practice (ICP)</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No qualification in childcare or ICP</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=580

### 3.2 Provision of care: offer and current take-up

#### 3.2.1 Registered places

The average number of childcare places that childminders were registered for was five (M=5.1). More than a third of childminders (34.4 per cent) were registered for six places and 20 per cent, respectively, were registered for four and five places each. Table 3.6 shows the breakdown of number of registered childcare places.

Table 3.6 Number of registered childcare places

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Places</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 or 2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 or more</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=569

The majority of childminders (93.5 per cent) were registered to provide care for children less than 1 year. Table 3.7 shows a breakdown of youngest age groups childminders were registered to provide care for.

---

19 Qualifications mentioned by less than 5 per cent of childminders were excluded from this table. Childminders could have more than one qualification in childcare.
Table 3.7 Youngest child age registered to care for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-year-olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-year-olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-year-olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year-olds or older children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=578

3.2.2 Children currently being cared for

Most childminders cared for toddlers (71.0 per cent) and preschool children (60.3 per cent). These findings suggest that as children get older they are less likely to be cared for by childminders (see Table 3.8). On average, childminders cared for 2-3 different age groups of children (e.g. one childminder may care for infants, toddlers and preschoolers).

Table 3.8 Age groups of children currently being cared for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infants (under 1 year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddlers (1- to 2-year-olds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool children (3- to 4-year-olds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School age children (5- to 7-year-olds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older school age children (8-year-olds and older)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=552

In terms of ethnic groups of children currently in childminders’ care, most childminders (85.3 per cent) cared for White children. The biggest ethnic minority groups of children cared for by childminders were mixed (22.9 per cent) and Black (22.1 per cent) children (see Table 3.9).

Table 3.9 Ethnic groups of children currently being cared for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=552

Childminders were also asked if they were caring for disabled children or children with SEN. A small proportion of childminders cared for SEN children
(13.0 per cent) and an even smaller proportion for disabled children (4.4 per cent).

In terms of unpaid care for children, slightly more than half of childminders (51.9 per cent) cared for children for whom they did not get paid. The majority of these childminders cared for one (33.2 per cent) or two (44.5 per cent) children on an unpaid basis, and more than half of these children (55.5 per cent) were under the age of 5.

### 3.2.3 Time when care is offered

Most childminders (79.8 per cent) provided care on all five weekdays. Table 3.10 shows the number of days childminders provided care during the week (excluding weekends). Friday was the least common weekday that childminders worked (i.e. 14.6 per cent of childminders did not work on a Friday). No childminder in our sample offered care less than 2 days during the week.

**Table 3.10 Number of weekday working days**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n=581*

As seen in Table 3.11, some childminders also offered care over the weekend (9.7 per cent) and overnight (7.3 per cent).

In terms of working hours, most childminders (74.9 per cent) offered care before 8am, whereas only about a fifth (21.4 per cent) offered care after 7pm.

**Table 3.11 'Out of hours’ care**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overnight</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before 8am</td>
<td>74.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 7pm</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n=581*

On average, childminders provided care for 8.5 hours per typical weekday, and they worked for an average of 40 hours per week. Table 3.12 shows a breakdown of number of hours childminders worked per week. The majority of childminders (62.5 per cent) worked between 31 and 50 hours per week. Thirteen per cent worked very long hours (i.e. 51 or more hours per week).
Table 3.12 Average weekly working hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 hours or less</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 hours</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 hours</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 hours or more</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=554

In terms of taking time off from childminding, childminders took an average of 4 weeks per year of annual leave. However, more than a third (34.2 per cent) took 3 weeks or less (see Table 3.13).

Table 3.13 Number of weeks of annual leave

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=577

We also asked childminders about their hourly charges; however, we received a very low response to this question (i.e. only 18 per cent of the sample responded to this item on the survey) and thus did not analyse it. According to childminders, 8.5 per cent had their fees partly covered by the free early years entitlement for 3- to 4-year-olds.

3.3 Provision of care: quality and views on caring

3.3.1 Views on childcare quality

Childminders were asked to rate several features of childcare provision in terms of their importance to overall childcare quality. They rated each feature on a scale from 1='not at all important' to 10='very important'. On average, all features of childcare provision were rated as important to quality; however, some aspects were seen as slightly more important than others (see Figure 3.1).

The most important features of childcare provision perceived by childminders were providing a safe physical environment, making children feel loved and meeting individual children’s needs. The least important included qualifications and training in taking care of children and teaching of cultural and religious values, even though these were still considered quite important.
3.3.2 Views on caring

We also wanted to explore childminders’ views on caring for children, particularly in relation to the importance childminders attach to letting children make their own choices and taking their own decisions while in their care. Table 3.14 displays the findings for each of the eight items included in the survey.

Table 3.14 Per cent agreement on the importance of children’s individual choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent agreement on the importance of children’s individual choices</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children have a right to their own point of view and should be allowed to express it.</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A child’s ideas should be seriously considered in making decisions.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children like to teach other children.</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What carers teach children is very important for his/her school success.</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carers should go along with the game when a child is pretending something.</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s all right for a child to disagree with his/her carers.</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children should be allowed to disagree with carers if they feel their own ideas are better.</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Children learn best by doing things themselves rather than listening to others. 

| n=580 |

Overall, the majority of childminders agreed that children should be allowed to make their own choices while in childminders’ care. Childminders were less likely to agree with the items focusing on the degree to which children can voice their opinions even if in contrast to their caregivers. These items formulate a scale on caregivers’ progressive, democratic beliefs about childrearing (vs. traditional, authoritarian beliefs). The average scale score among childminders was 4.4 ($SE=0.02$) with scale scores ranging from 1 to 5 and 5 indicating more progressive/democratic childrearing beliefs.

### 3.4 Activities with children

As seen in Table 3.15, almost all childminders (92.1 per cent) planned several activities for children every week, and the majority (80.1 per cent) planned daily activities. However, there was a small proportion of childminders (6.4 per cent) who did not plan any activities for children on a weekly basis.

#### Table 3.15 Frequency of planned activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Several per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two to four per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=576

In terms of actual activities, most childminders (88.1 per cent) tended to read stories to children every day and involved children in counting activities (82.7 per cent) and gross motor activities (e.g., running, climbing, sliding, playing with the ball; 83.3 per cent). In terms of television viewing, more than 40 per cent of childminders (43.7 per cent) allowed children to watch television daily, and more than a quarter (27.7 per cent) allowed children to watch it two to four times a week (see Figure 3.2).
Nearly half of childminders (45.5 per cent) allowed children to spend a couple of hours per day in free play (i.e. not in any planned activity). A very small proportion of childminders (6.5 per cent) allowed children to spend all day in free play (see Table 3.16).

Table 3.16 Time spent in free play daily

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Half an hour</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One hour</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A couple of hours</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half a day</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All day</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not surprisingly, childminders who did not plan any activities with children were more likely to allow children to spend all day in free play (39.7 per cent); whereas, only 4.0 per cent of childminders who planned at least one activity per week for children allowed them to spend all day in free play.
As seen in Table 3.17, in the 3 months prior to the survey, almost all childminders took children to the local park (96.8 per cent) and to the playground (94.6 per cent). The majority of childminders also took children to the local playgroup (85.1 per cent) and to the library (82.6 per cent). Children were least likely to have visited the seaside with their childminders, mainly due to lack of accessibility (i.e. 30.1 per cent of childminders did not live near the seaside). Most other places were accessible to childminders.

Table 3.17 Outings childminder organised in the past 3 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local park/country Park/woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoo/farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seaside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroup or other club (e.g. one o’clock clubs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s centre (e.g., Stay and Play)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local shops</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=563

3.5 Commitment and job satisfaction

3.5.1 Reasons for becoming a childminder

As seen in Table 3.18, the majority of childminders started to work as childminders because they wanted to stay at home with their children (75.1 per cent) and/or wanted to work with children (64.1 per cent). In addition to those listed in the survey, childminders also reported other reasons for becoming a childminder including changing careers and flexible working.

Table 3.18 Reasons for becoming a childminder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To stay at home with their own children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To work with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To work in their own home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help working mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A friend or acquaintance approached them to look after their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide company for their own children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=581
Nearly 40 per cent of childminders (38.1 per cent) have been practicing for 1 to 5 years and slightly more than a half of them (53.9 per cent) have practiced for 6 years or more (see Table 3.19). More than a fifth (20.6 per cent) have worked for 16 years or more.

Table 3.19 Length of time in practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less then 1 year</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 years or more</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=539

3.5.2 Commitment to childminding

The majority of childminders (70.7 per cent) reported that they will continue working as a childminder in the next year or the foreseeable future.

All childminders were asked what would be the main reason to stop working as a childminder. As seen in Table 3.20, the most common cited reason was retirement (21.9 per cent), followed by the demands of the EYFS (17.3 per cent). In addition to the reasons listed in Table 3.20, childminders also indicated that lack of work or competition from other providers, paperwork or over-regulation, stress of the job and health were reasons that they would stop working as a childminder.

Table 3.20 Main reason to stop practicing in the future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another job not related to childcare</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another job in childcare</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs of my own children</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My children starting school</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands of EYFS</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=559; only one response allowed

3.5.3 Job satisfaction

Childminders rated their satisfaction with several aspects of their jobs as well as their overall job satisfaction on a 10 point scale from 1=‘not at all satisfied’ to 10=‘completely satisfied’. Interestingly, childminders were, on average, more satisfied with their jobs in general than with particular aspects of their job (see Figure 3.3). In terms of specific aspects of their jobs, childminders were most
satisfied with their working hours and the recognition they get for their work and the least satisfied with the job security.

**Figure 3.3 Childminders’ average job satisfaction**

![Bar chart showing average job satisfaction](chart.png)

*n=575*

### 3.6 Relationship with parents

#### 3.6.1 Involving parents in children’s learning

Childminders were also asked about their relationship with parents, particularly how they engaged with parents to support children’s learning and development. Table 3.21 provides a list of opportunities to involve parents in children’s learning broken down by the frequency that childminders took up these opportunities.

Nearly three-quarters of childminders (72.2 per cent) reported that they always set aside time in the morning or at departure to allow parents to discuss their children. More than half of childminders reported that parents shared their observations of their children at home (56.3 per cent) and childminders gave parents informal support for their children’s learning at home (52.3 per cent). In contrast, a very small percentage of childminders reported that they rarely or never involved parents in children’s learning in the ways listed in Table 3.21.

**Table 3.21 Frequency of childminders’ involvement of parents in children’s learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents spend time in childminders’ home with their children.</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time is specifically set aside at mornings and</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
going home times to allow parents to discuss their children.

Parents share their observations of what children say and do in their own home.  

Childminder use parents’ observations to determine how you plan activities for children.

Childminder gives parents informal support for their children’s learning in their own home (e.g., book borrowing, ideas for places to visit, tips on activities to do at home).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>56.3</th>
<th>38.7</th>
<th>2.7</th>
<th>2.3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents share their observations of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what children say and do in their</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>own home.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childminder use parents’ observations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to determine how you plan activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for children.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childminder gives parents informal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support for their children’s learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in their own home (e.g., book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| borrowing, ideas for places to visit,
| tips on activities to do at home).   |       |      |     |     |

n=578

### 3.6.2 Tensions with parents

As seen in Table 3.22, almost half of childminders, respectively, experienced incidents with parents around late payment (45.3 per cent) and timekeeping (44.0 per cent). Other common problems with parents included being ‘taken for granted’ or not feeling appreciated for what childminders do (40.9 per cent) and parents bringing in children when they are sick (35.3 per cent). In addition to the issues listed in Table 3.22, a small percentage of childminders reported other tensions, such as parent having variable working hours and parents’ general demeanour.

#### Table 3.22 Tensions with parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tension</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ timekeeping</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childminders time keeping</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late payment by parents</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeing the rates and terms of payment</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children being taken sick while in their care</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent bringing sick children into care</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of being ‘taken for granted’ or not feeling appreciated for</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what they do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=581

### 3.7 Memberships in childminding networks and source of support

In terms of various childminding organisations, most childminders in our sample (79.6 per cent) were members of NCMA, and more than 40 per cent of childminders (42.9 per cent) were members of a local childminding association or organisation. Table 3.23 provides a list of membership in various organisations.
Table 3.23 Membership in childminding organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership in childminding organisation</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCMA</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local childminding association/organisation</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school Learning Alliance</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Children</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Day Nurseries Association</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=581

Nearly half of childminders in the survey sample (48.0 per cent) were members of a NCMA or local authority coordinated network.

In terms of source of support for childminding, the majority of childminders (73.3 per cent) relied on other childminders. About half of childminders (51.5 per cent) also requested help or advice from a local authority advisor. A small percentage of childminders (11.1 per cent) never sought any help or advice with childminding. Table 3.24 lists the most frequently sought sources for advice or help.

Table 3.24 Most frequent sources of help for childminders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of help</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other childminder</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authority advisor (e.g., Childcare Coordinator or Childminding Development Officer)</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network coordinator</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCMA</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Centre</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=581

The majority of childminders (93.5 per cent) reported that they were either very or somewhat satisfied with the support they received.

3.8 Knowledge and attitudes towards regulations and the EYFS

3.8.1 Knowledge of the EYFS

One of the goals of this survey was to explore childminders’ knowledge of and attitudes towards the EYFS. Table 3.25 presents a breakdown of the level of EYFS knowledge childminders perceived they had. The majority of childminders (81.8 per cent) felt they were quite or fairly knowledgeable of the EYFS and an additional thirteen per cent felt they knew a little about it. However, about five per cent of childminders knew nothing about the EYFS or had never heard of it.
Table 3.25 Childminders’ knowledge of the EYFS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of the EYFS</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Know it very well</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know a fair amount about it</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know a little about it</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have heard of it but know nothing about it</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have never heard of it</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=580

Further findings related to EYFS are only applicable to those childminders who knew at least a little about EYFS (n=552).

### 3.8.2 Help with the EYFS

Nearly 60 per cent of childminders (58.7 per cent) thought that their local authority or local council was the most instrumental in them getting to know more about the EYFS. Half of childminders, respectively, did their own research and/or relied on other childminders. Other helpful resources to learn about the EYFS included the NCMA, childminding networks or groups including network coordinators, as well as attending academic courses (see Table 3.26). Almost eight per cent of childminders listed other resources, such as Sure Start, Ofsted or a school, nursery or teacher.

Table 3.26 Most helpful resources to learn about the EYFS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local authority/council</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childminding network or group</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childminding network coordinator</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCMA</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other childminders</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Centre</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own work or research</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private provider</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic course</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other resources</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=553

### 3.8.3 Perceptions of the EYFS

We wanted to explore what childminders thought about the EYFS, particularly what they liked the most about it and their biggest challenges to date.

In terms of what they liked the most about the EYFS, the majority of childminders liked that the EYFS provided guidance (60.2 per cent) and a
common framework for providers (59.6 per cent; see Table 3.27). Half of childminders, respectively, also liked that the EYFS enabled monitoring and assessment of children’s progress and that it had a child-centred focus. A small percentage of childminders also suggested additional aspects of the EYFS that they liked including its flexibility and coverage of a wide range of ages as well as being easy to understand. Only 2 per cent of childminders reported that they did not like anything about the EYFS.

Table 3.27 Aspects of the EYFS that childminders liked the most

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides guidance for providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a common framework for providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enables monitoring and assessment of children’s progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-centred focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes a professional image for childminders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves overall learning and outcomes for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play-based focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves quality care for all children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good for working with parents and other professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other aspects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=552

Table 3.28 lists childminders’ perceptions of the challenges of the EYFS. A large majority of childminders thought that the amount of paperwork (88.1 per cent) and lack of time to fulfil all requirements (79.8 per cent) were the most challenging aspects of the framework. In addition, more than half of childminders (55.9 per cent) found that requirements to monitor and assess children’s progress were a key challenge. Interestingly, as summarised in Table 3.27, about half of childminders (52.1 per cent) reported that the monitoring and assessment of children’s progress was a benefit of the EYFS. Further analyses revealed that 28.8 per cent of childminders perceived the monitoring and assessment of children’s progress as both a benefit and a challenge of the EYFS. Seven per cent of childminders mentioned other aspects of the EYFS that they found challenging, such as inconsistency in information that is provided and information being confusing and complicated, particularly vis-à-vis the language used.

Table 3.28 Aspects of the EYFS that childminders found most challenging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The amount of paperwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time to fulfil all requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements to monitor and assess children’s progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ofsted inspections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative exchange among other childminders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to link/exchange information with other settings/schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to engage with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative media coverage of EYFS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=553

3.9 Chapter summary

Most childminders were female and in their mid-40s, on average. Slightly more than half were qualified to at least Level 3. Yet, 12 per cent of the sample had no qualifications. More than 70 per cent of childminders had a childcare-specific qualification.

Childminders were registered to provide care to at least five children, on average, at any one time, and most were registered to provide care from infancy. At the time of the survey, most childminders were caring for toddlers and preschoolers. Childminders cared for a relatively diverse group of children in terms of their ethnicity, but few cared for disabled children or children with special educational needs. Childminders tended to work full-time and many worked long hours (i.e. more than 40 hours per week) or extended hours (i.e. early opening). Childminders tended to take a maximum of 4 weeks of annual leave.

Childminders found many typical aspects of childcare quality important, particularly providing a safe, loving and stimulating environment for children where their individual needs are met. Although still relatively important, childminders were less likely to view qualifications and training and teaching of religious or cultural values of primary importance. By and large, childminders held more progressive, democratic beliefs about caring for children such that they believed that children should be allowed to make their own choices.

Childminders engaged in a mix of activities with children including reading, counting and physical activities. Yet, they also seemed to value children’s free time with all but 4 per cent of childminders indicating that children had at least an hour daily for free play. Most childminders incorporated community resources such as parks, libraries and playgroups into their care.

Most childminders chose their profession so they could be home with their own children or because they wanted to work with children. The majority of childminders in our sample had no immediate intentions to stop their work and were largely satisfied with their jobs. Childminders tended to be least satisfied with the job security and monetary aspects of their work.

Childminders tended to involve parents in their care in a variety of ways, notably sharing information about children and supporting children’s learning at home. Childminders were able to identify some tensions working with parents.
including timekeeping, late payments and a general sense of being taken for granted.

Childminders were members of a variety of organisations, most notably NCMA. About half of our sample reported being in a NCMA or local authority coordinated network. Childminders sought support primarily from other childminders and local authority advisors and were generally pleased with the level of support they received.

More than 80 per cent of childminders were very or fairly knowledgeable about the EYFS, and learned about it through their local authorities and other childminders, as well as their own research. The aspects of the EYFS that childminders liked the most were that it provides guidance and a common framework for providers, enables monitoring and assessment of children and is child-centred. The degree of paperwork and the time involved in fulfilling the EYFS requirements were noted as the main challenges of the EYFS.
4 Childminding clusters

In this chapter, the results from the cluster analysis based on the survey data are presented.

Two-step cluster analyses revealed that the childminders in our sample fit into four distinct clusters based on the following key background and practice-related input variables:

- Whether childminder had any childcare specific qualifications or training
- Whether childminder was a member of a NCMA or local authority coordinated childminding network
- Whether childminder cared for disabled children or children with SEN
- Ethnicity (White vs. non-White)
- Highest qualification level (range: 1=no qualifications to 6=Level 4 or 5)
- Number of years in practice
- Overall knowledge of the EYFS (range: 1=have never heard of it to 5=know it very well)
- Likelihood of childminder practicing in the future (range: 1=very unlikely to 4=very likely).

We present further detail on the childminders in each of the clusters based on the input variables.

4.1 Description of childminding clusters by input variables

Table 4.1 displays the percentages and average scores for each of the eight input variables (listed above) by cluster grouping (i.e. C1-C4). For categorical variables (i.e. childcare specific qualifications, network membership, care for disabled/SEN children, ethnicity and highest qualification), we ran cross tabulations using the Stata complex survey commands. For continuous and ordinal variables (i.e. number of years in practice, overall knowledge of the EYFS and likelihood of continuing to practice in the future), we ran mean estimations to obtain the means for each cluster.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childminders have childcare specific training or qualification</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>C3</th>
<th>C4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>96.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childminders have been members of NCMA or local authority childminding network</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>C3</th>
<th>C4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childminder have been caring for disabled children or children with SEN</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>C3</th>
<th>C4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table presents percentages for categorical variables and means (standard errors) for continuous and ordinal variables. Key features that define each childminding cluster are highlighted in bold; n=489.

As seen in Table 4.1 above, C1 is primarily defined by being networked childminders. Indeed, each childminder in this cluster reported membership in a NCMA or local authority coordinated network. C1 childminders also had a relatively high knowledge of the EYFS and about half had a Level 3 qualification, with a further 20 per cent with Level 4 or 5 qualifications.

C2 are relatively diverse childminders with about half coming from BME backgrounds (the remaining clusters were largely White). These childminders – relative to childminders in the other clusters – were most likely to care for disabled/SEN children. Similar to C1, C2 childminders were relatively qualified and knowledgeable of the EYFS.

Childminders in C3 were not part of recognised networks. Yet, they were moderately qualified (about half had a Level 3 qualification, but only about 4 per cent had a Level 4 or 5 qualifications) and knowledgeable about the EYFS.

Finally, childminders in C4 were perhaps the most distinct group. These childminders had been practicing for 17 years on average. Yet, less than one-fifth had a childcare specific qualification and nearly half had no recognised qualifications. Some BME childminders and childminders who cared for disabled children fit into this cluster. Slightly less than a quarter were in networks, and this group was the least knowledgeable of the EYFS.

Based on the findings presented above, we present a brief synopsis of each of the four clusters below, highlighting their key differentiating background and practice-based characteristics.

- C1: highly networked and qualified and knowledgeable of the EYFS
• C2: diverse (both in terms of their ethnicity as well as the children they care for), qualified and knowledgeable of the EYFS
• C3: not networked and moderately qualified
• C4: long time childminders: lowest knowledge of the EYFS, lowest qualifications, not very likely to be networked and some diversity.

Further analyses were run to examine whether childminders differed on key variables depending on their cluster membership. In particular, we selected the following variables to examine by cluster:

- Age groups of children cared for
- Working hours
- Views on childcare quality and childrearing
- Activities and free play
- Reasons for becoming a childminder and reasons to stop practicing
- Job satisfaction
- Relationship with parents
- Sources of support
- Perceptions of the EYFS.

The findings revealed, that while there were some significant differences between the clusters, childminders were more similar than different to one another on these variables. The full findings are presented in Appendix E.

4.3 Chapter summary

Results from cluster analysis revealed that childminders fit into four ‘clusters’ based on their key background and practice-related characteristics including highest qualification level and whether childminder holds any childcare specific qualifications or training, network membership, whether childminder cares for disabled children, ethnicity, number of years in practice, knowledge of the EYFS and likelihood of practicing in the future.

More specifically, childminders in C1 were highly networked and qualified and knowledgeable of the EYFS. Further analyses revealed that they were also the most positive about the EYFS, particularly in terms of it providing a common framework for providers and its child-centred focus. In addition to being qualified and knowledgeable of the EYFS, childminders in C2 were ethnically diverse and tended to care for disabled/SEN children. Childminders in C3 were not members of networks and were moderately qualified. Finally, childminders in C4 had been in the profession for a long time and had the lowest knowledge of the EYFS, lowest qualifications and were not very likely to be networked.

Although childminders differed on the variables that composed the clusters, they were more similar than different in terms of their working hours, the activities they provided for children in their care, their attitudes and beliefs about childcare and their general job satisfaction (see Appendix E for full results). Based on this analysis, then, it is not possible to make any strong conclusions about the quality of care children are receiving based on, for example, childminders’ qualifications, length of time in practice or knowledge of the EYFS.
5 Childminders’ beliefs about their practice

This is the first of four sections focusing on the qualitative interview and observation data.

As reflected in the EYFS welfare and learning requirements, respectively, the caring and learning aspects of early years provision are equally important, even if it seems that a false dichotomy is created between the two at times. Most early years providers would argue – including the childminders interviewed for the study – that learning cannot occur in the absence of a caring, trusting relationship between carer and child. As such, childminders’ views of their roles as both carer and learning provider are summarised in this section. We begin with the former, focusing on childminders’ initial reasons for becoming a home-based childcare provider, followed by their understanding of the attributes and characteristics of a high-quality childminder, and ending with their views on how childminding is distinct from nursery provision. This last section provides a segue into a review of childminders’ perceptions of how children learn including two of the key features of childminding practice: tailored provision to individual children and the use of free play as the platform for children’s learning.

This section will focus primarily on childminders’ views and attitudes with Chapter 7 exploring in more detail what was actually observed in childminding homes.

5.1 Childminders’ beliefs about caring

Perhaps the most common theme to emerge from the interview data was childminders’ ethos of caring. This came through in childminders’ explanations of why they initially chose their profession, how they gauged quality in childminding and how childcare in childminding homes is distinct from and, at least for young children, superior to nursery provision. This theme of caring also carries through in the following section when childminders describe how they help young children to learn.

5.1.1 Reasons for choosing childminding

Although reasons for remaining in the profession may have evolved over time, childminders almost unanimously cited personal caregiving responsibilities as a reason for initially choosing childminding. For some childminders, this choice was value-neutral: they enjoyed young children, they themselves had young children and they could earn money by linking the two, so childminding naturally fit into their lives.

I became a mother and enjoyed it and I didn’t want to leave my children. So I wanted to stay at home and I was finding I was spending more and more time having more and more other people’s children in my house so I thought, ah, this might be a way of earning money, so yeah that’s why I became a childminder.

Childminder, practicing for 20 years
For other childminders, it was family members or neighbours in need of childcare that facilitated entry into the profession.

For others, however, the decision to become a home-based childcare provider was more complex. The economic need to work forced some childminders’ hands. For example, one childminder found statutory maternity benefits insufficient income and wanted to be able to support herself. Another cited the need to work to ‘keep her house’, and another did not want to remain on income support. Some childminders felt as if they were ‘missing out’ on their children’s development or felt uncomfortable placing their young children in nursery, which made them realise that working outside of the home was not the best option. One childminder who felt this way about her young child believed childminding was a means of ‘interming[ling] work and family life’. Even among some of the childminders who did not necessarily choose childminding as their desired career, it ended up being a happy decision. Some childminders came into the role after their children had grown up because it was something they had always wanted to do.

Many childminders interviewed very much saw childminding as their chosen profession and were committed to helping to raise its profile more widely. The most satisfied childminders valued their role and saw themselves as making a difference in the lives of children and families.

And I think then, I have made an impact, I’ve made an impact in your life and that’s a memory that you’re going to hold forever and that’s good, that’s positive. So I would like to say, I will do this job, all being well until I retire, until I can’t work anymore, I can always see me being a childminder and developing forward. I’d like to do my degree, further training and hopefully raise the profile of childminding, that people don’t just think we’re stay at home mums.

Childminder, practicing for 4 years

For some women, even though they enjoyed their jobs, childminding was ultimately viewed as a stop-gap: something they did in the interim while their children were young. One childminder indicated that childminding was not her ‘dream job’. While she enjoyed the flexibility of childminding relative to an ‘office job’, she was not sure if she would stay in the profession after her youngest child started school. Others had some misgivings about childminding, but also recognised some of the benefits: one interviewee indicated that after stopping childminding for a few years she returned to it as she liked ‘being her own boss’ and the flexibility of being able to fit her work in with her own children’s needs.

Some childminders, who also tended to be quite satisfied with their jobs, wished to continue training and receiving qualifications in early childhood or complementary fields. Interestingly, some childminders viewed childminding as a stepping stone to a career in teaching or a related field.

I’m totally happy doing it...when I’ve finished my degree I’m going to go in to do my teaching, but I want to do teaching in the Early Years so I want to go into Year R or Year 1, I want to do the Early Years teaching.

Childminder, practicing for 4 years
Most of the childminders interviewed felt quite strongly about some of the negative stereotypes of childminders, in particular the view that childminders put the children in their care in front of the television all day long. They hoped that their work helped to overcome these unfavourable images.

The ‘intentionality’ of childminders including their commitment, professional approach and child-related motivation varied. The choice to become a childminder often evolved out of personal caring responsibilities, but the choice to remain tended to focus on the love of the job and the feeling of making an impact in the lives of children and families. For some childminders, childminding was a satisfying career that they planned to stick with (regardless of personal circumstances), and they wanted to raise the profile of childminding and move away from negative and hurtful stereotypes. Some childminders did not plan to remain in the profession once their children were older or they had completed their training.

5.1.2 ‘Good’ childminders

In this section, the way that childminders articulate the key elements of a ‘good childminder’ is explored. This was an aspect of the research in which childminders’ views were extremely consistent.

In interviews, childminders stressed that a ‘good childminder’ needs to love children as well as love working with children. According to childminders, a high-quality childminder was someone who is caring, loving, interested in and respectful of children, accepting, approachable, friendly, responsive and communicative. Childminders discussed peers with long service to the profession who lacked the important personal attributes, such as really enjoying and respecting children, and provided low-quality care regardless of the tenure of their experience. In some childminders’ minds, childminders either had ‘it’ or they did not regardless of experience, whereas other childminders firmly believed in the importance of experience and qualifications for quality. Childminders described the importance of forming a strong, trusting relationship between themselves and individual children that entailed childminders treating the children in their care like their own and making them feel that they were part of the childminders’ families.

Childminders described themselves as being the ‘other special person’ in young children’s lives and saw themselves as providing a ‘home away from home’. The ethos of being ‘like a family member’ was still very present among many interviewees who saw this close relationship as an aid to children’s learning and as a support to families. Some childminders identified with the mothering role, seeing themselves as ‘the next best thing to Mum’ and as a ‘stand in’ for mothers when they were not able to be present. On the other hand, some childminders firmly asserted that they were not the children’s mothers, even if they were an adult who provided care and comfort to the children in a home setting.

As discussed in more detail in Section 5.2, childminders felt that children needed to feel safe and secure in order to learn, and that making children feel safe and secure was a necessary foundation for their learning – one that toys and materials could not substitute. For example, one childminder felt that the
environment was of little importance next to the relationship between the
childminder and the children in her care.

> I think you can child mind in any setting, I think if you lived in a flat you
could have just as good a childminder minding as you could if you had a
big massive mansion with gardens and I think it’s the childminder
themselves... It doesn’t necessarily have to be the toys I don’t think
you have to have huge amounts of toys I don’t believe that at all because you
can take them places... If they [children] don’t like you if they don’t trust
you they’re not going to learn from you no matter what you provide for
them they won’t do it children will pick up on that straight away.

Childminder, practicing for 4 years

Thus, love and care was key to good childminding. Most childminders drew a
firm line between themselves and the children’s families, while others perceived
themselves as a substitute mother. Regardless, a close, trusting relationship
was the core upon which good childminding was built. Indeed, this affection
between childminders and children enabled childminders to offer children
individual or tailored provision, an aspect of childminding explored in more
detail below.

### 5.1.3 Unique aspects of childminding homes

Most of the childminders interviewed felt that they offered a very different
service than nurseries. In describing these differences, childminders highlighted
their views on the unique aspects of their practice.

Overall, childminders felt strongly that very young children (particularly children
under 3 years of age) did not belong in nurseries. Nurseries were seen as too
formal in terms of activities and planning, too large in terms of staff to child
ratios and too impersonal in terms of young children not having access to a
consistent caregiver (whether due to several providers being in one classroom
or because of high staff turnover rates). Some childminders indicated that when
children reached the age of 3-4 years, attending nursery could have some
benefits as it was perceived as being more similar to a school environment than
childminders’ homes were and because nursery exposed children to larger
numbers of their peers.

Childminders saw their homes as a contrast to the ‘busy, noisy’ nursery
environment. The fact that they offered care in their homes made it less formal
and more comfortable for young children. Childminders felt that their service
provided the necessary one-to-one attention that young children needed, and
some childminders specifically choose only to care for a very small number of
children to ensure that all of the children in their care received adequate
individual attention.

The most consistent theme that emerged when childminders described their
services in contrast to a nursery environment was that of flexibility. Relative to
nursery providers, childminders saw themselves as better able to reflect the
needs of children and adapt their environments as necessary, which was
important to children’s learning. Many childminders cited the ability to go to
different places in their communities as part of this tailored provision, as well as
the ability to be spontaneous in responding to children’s interests and needs.

Of particular importance to childminders’ provision was their use of community
resources. The ease with which childminders could take children out and about
was something that some childminders believed set them apart from centre-
based carers, where outings were generally a more onerous and time
consuming process. One childminder explained how in the summer she liked to
take children to the coast. She simply had to ask parents for their consent a
week in advance and was able to go, which contrasted with her experience in a
nursery where organising logistics and consent were more time consuming
processes. Childminders also felt that relative to centre-based care they were
able to use community resources more flexibly. That is, childminders did not
have to follow a pre-planned schedule for the day, but rather could amend or
change activities to suit the needs of children.

They’d been at a christening the day before so the little one and the oldest
one, the siblings, so I had planned to go to the park but I could tell they
were so tired so I changed the plan and we had a quiet afternoon.

Childminder, practicing for 5.5 years

Some childminders admitted that even though nurseries lacked the degree of
tailored provision and flexibility that childminders offered, they were able to
offer children a wider array of toys and materials and larger numbers of staff to
contribute their ‘ideas and personalities’. Yet, some childminders used
community resources specifically for this purpose. That is, getting out and
about provided an opportunity for the children to socialise with other children
and play with toys that the childminder did not have at home.

Given these contrasts that childminders made with nursery provision and the
importance of learning in early years provision, it is important to examine
childminders’ views of how children learn and how their provision facilitates
children’s development. Childminders’ beliefs on learning are the focus of the
following section.

5.2 Childminders’ beliefs about learning

As highlighted in the sections above, childminders very strongly felt that
provision of a loving, safe environment was the necessary foundation for
children’s learning. In particular, childminders set themselves apart from
nursery providers, in part, because of their ability to provide a comfortable
environment for children to learn in. This section explores childminders’
understanding of how children learn and how they facilitated learning. Detailed
examples from the observations are provided in Chapter 7. Some of the themes
mentioned in the above section on tailored provision are described in more
detail.

Childminders reported that their views on how children learn and methods of
supporting their learning were formed by a combination of following:

- Their own experiences of parenting
- Previous experience of working with children
Childminders were somewhat divided on the relative importance of ‘hands on’ experience with parenting or childcare relative to relevant qualifications or training.

Many childminders had difficulty articulating their theories on how children learn and develop, arguing against what they felt was a false distinction between the caring and learning aspects of their provision. That is, if children did not feel confident and secure, children were not able to open themselves up to learning.

*It’s to just make the children feel safe and secure and, because if you nurture children, and they’ve got good self esteem everything else will come. If they feel loved and cared for, and they know their boundaries, children need to know their boundaries, and positive role models, then everything else does come. Because if children feel safe and secure then everything else within the learning, it’s all a big blanket really because then they’ll want to learn and they’ll want to do things and they’ll feel safe and happy and secure.*

Childminder, practicing for 3 years

Childminders were able to discuss what they could do to provide learning opportunities to children. First, they *tailored their provision to the individual needs and interests of children in their care.* Childminders unanimously expressed the importance of tailoring their provision to children’s individual needs and interests to help children learn, thus offering bespoke care. They did this using free play, everyday routines and planned activities.

...*you should know where that child is, what that child’s interests are, and bring them on, not just leave them to play with the same toys the whole time but swap and change, take them out places so they know their community, all sorts of things.*

Childminder, practicing for 5.5 years

Some childminders indicated that they had to be able to read children’s mood on any given day and change tack on the spot:

*You know it’s a case of being all things to all men really and recognising each child’s separate needs and letting them do it.*

Childminder, practicing for 7 years

This aspect of childminders’ provision was viewed as a unique aspect of their care relative to other early years providers. Specific examples of tailored provision in practice are provided in Chapter 7.

Second, childminders *used free play as the primary mechanism for children’s learning.* Very much linked to childminders’ ability to tailor their provision to the needs and interests of individual children in their care was their reliance on free...
play to help children learn. Some childminders particularly liked that the EYFS formally promoted play as the means of facilitating young children’s learning as it validated their long-running practice.

Many childminders interviewed voiced the view that free play enabled children to learn based on their own interests, rather than the childminder telling children what they were going to learn on a given day. Childminders felt that children learned best when they were happiest and could relax, which children might not be able to do in a very strict, structured environment. That is, in childminding homes, children believed they were playing, not learning, which kept them interested and receptive to learning new things. Most childminders saw their role as facilitators of children’s free play and introduced learning by ‘scaffolding’, which includes observing children’s play, recognising the stage of learning children are at and providing guidance and support to help children reach the next stage. At times, however, childminders also thought it was important for children to engage in free play without input from the childminder.

It is important to note that childminders’ heavy reliance on free play as the key conduit of children’s learning could be risky if childminders were not attuned to children’s needs and interests, thereby missing opportunities for children’s learning. This is explored further in Chapter 7 where observed practice is described in detail.

Finally, childminders offered planned learning activities but never forced children to engage in them. While free play was the staple of childminding practice, some childminders complemented free play with planned learning activities (i.e. activities specifically planned to help children learn) including doing puzzles to help the child’s concentration, visiting local parks to learn about different animals and plants and cooking to teach children about measurements and mixing. Not surprisingly, most childminders who did plan learning activities felt quite strongly that these should still be quite fun for young children and not be overly ‘structured’, a characteristic they attributed to nursery and schools.

...the children have got to have the choice of what they want to do, so some structure is OK, but too much is like being in the Army, like no, nobody, not even adults really enjoy that.

Childminder, practicing for 7 years

Providing planned learning activities for children was very important to some childminders who stressed that they needed to prepare children for school including:

- Writing their names, recognising colours and counting
- Being able to sit and concentrate in school on tasks that children may or may not want to do
- Having practical skills, such as learning how to get on with other people, manners and hygiene
- Progressing children on their EYFS learning goals.

For some childminders this meant a stronger concentration on structured learning activities to learn basic literacy and numeracy skills, as well as
behavioural control. Even in these cases, however, childminders allowed children to make choices about participation.

*I would never make a child. I would strongly encourage some children because I do think it's important. When they go to school the teacher's not going to say, do you want to do this or do you just want to play out. So the ones that are getting ready for nursery I'm a little bit more, oh come on, just ten minutes, make something for my wall.*

Childminder, practicing for 3 years

5.3 Chapter summary

This section focused primarily on childminder’s views and attitudes about childminding based on interview data. The choice to become a childminder often evolved out of personal caring responsibilities, but the choice to remain tended to focus on the love of the job and the feeling of making an impact in the lives of children and families. A close, trusting relationship between childminders and children was the core upon which good childminding was built, although most childminders drew a firm line between themselves and the children’s families. Childminders very much saw their homes as a contrast to the ‘busy, noisy’ nursery environment and, thus, more appropriate for young children. Childminders’ ethos of learning revolved around tailored provision, the use of child-directed free play and some planned activities. Childminders felt strongly that young children could not – and would not – learn in an environment devoid of caring. Some childminders, but not all, saw preparing children for nursery or school as an important part of their jobs. Even among these childminders, it was still perceived as crucially important to allow children to have a voice in what they learned and how they learned it.
6 Routines and activities

In this chapter we describe the routines and activities that childminders provided for children. In the interviews childminders were asked to describe a ‘typical’ working day and their responses varied. This section explores the breadth of routines and activities that childminders described complemented by examples from the observation data (in boxes). Data from the parent interviews are also discussed to provide their views on the mix of activities that childminders offer.

6.1 Routines

All childminders reported that the daily schedule was determined by the timing and intersection of different routines including children’s personal routines (e.g. naps, meals), as well as external routines, such as collecting older children from schools. Some childminders had more external routines in their daily schedule than others. For example, some childminders dropped off or collected children from various schools in their vicinity resulting in several school runs in a given day. Other childminders rarely did school runs as they were less willing to have their day broken up by the regularity of the school runs, or they were unable to travel to and from schools with all of the children in their care. External routines, in particular, set an outline structure for childminders’ days, which then shaped the activities on offer and children’s personal routines. For example, the times of school runs influenced decisions around when children could nap or eat their lunch.

Then lunchtime is very interesting depending on who’s at playgroup. So we have some days where I’ve got children that have dinner at playgroup, some days where they have to have their dinner here before they go. Thursdays is just manic, we have to start dinner at about half past eleven because I have two that have to have their dinner before they go to playgroup, and then I have to pick another one up from a different playgroup, so I pick him up and then take them to their playgroup, but they’ve got to have had their dinner by then.

Childminder, practicing for 3 years

All childminders discussed participating in similar routines, but the specifics varied from one childminding setting to another. Involvement in routines was dependent, for example, on the arrival times of young children, which varied from 6am to 1pm. In terms of meals, some childminders offered breakfast, lunch and dinner while others only offered lunch.

Some childminders followed a strict schedule for their routines, such as always having lunch at a certain time. For other childminders, however, the timing of routines was flexible (with the exception of school runs, which were always fixed). With this flexible approach, meals and naps were arranged when the child most needed them.

I work with the parent to find out what the child likes, I’ll find out the child’s routine, and I work from that. It seems that most children that I
get seem to want to sleep in the afternoon. So I normally will take them out to a toddler group in the morning, or to the library or to the farm, or usually something, some form of outing and then be back in the afternoon so that they can have a nap.

Childminder, practicing for 5 years

Some childminders believed that routines helped to provide a ‘family’ atmosphere within the childminding setting, as these were activities that children do at home with their families. For example, one childminder highlighted how sitting down and eating together was something that families did, while another described going into the classroom with a child to help the child settle down, ‘just as a mother would do’.

6.2 Activities

The timings of the routines could, and did, influence the activities that childminders organised for children. As discussed above, routines, especially school runs, tended to set the structure of the day and some childminders planned activities around these time frames. Childminders were more likely to schedule planned activities with children at times when the risk of interruptions was minimised and they could devote more time to the activity. For example, childminders who cared for school-aged children were less likely to offer planned activities in the afternoon, as there was limited time available between school runs and parents’ collection times.

Some childminders described using themes to structure their activities. Themes were often related to holidays and seasons, and sometimes one theme was carried across a range of activities. For example, one childminder explained how the children in her care collected leaves on a walk, drew pictures of leaves and made plans to go to a harvest festival, all around the theme of ‘autumn’.

Below is a summary of the range of activities childminders provided:

- **Arts and crafts** including painting, gluing, sticking and play-doh. These were often planned activities, although not exclusively. Childminders often provided ideas and suggestions to support children, but children decided what they wanted to create and how they wanted to do it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Making hats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At play group the 3- and 4-year-olds made pirate hats out of cardboard. The childminder sat with the children and passed them any materials that they needed (e.g. glue, glitter). The childminder helped the children when they requested it, but otherwise observed them and made encouraging comments like ‘looking good!’ The children were encouraged to decide how they wanted to decorate their hats and were given praise for completing their hats.</td>
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Childminder, practicing for 2 years

- **Music** including singing, listening to music and playing instruments. In addition to offering music within their homes, some childminders took children to music sessions offered in their local areas. Music was often a
spontaneous activity that evolved from another activity or was taken up by children during free play. Music was both childminder- and child-initiated.

**Singing the 'Yellow Submarine’**

During free play the 4-year-olds had access to a keyboard and guitar, which they picked up and used. There was also music playing in the background. During the observation the children were sitting together working out a puzzle when they suddenly burst into song singing ‘We all live in a yellow submarine’. The childminder joined in with the singing and, upon request from the children, sung nursery rhymes for them.

Childminder, practicing for 6.5 years

- **Dramatic play** including clothes for dress up, toy home sets, dolls, cars and trains often occurred spontaneously during free play. Some childminders planned dress up time to encourage the children to use their imaginations

- **Reading** was a planned activity for some childminders who set aside time daily for story time. Some childminders had books on display for children to choose from, but did not necessarily set aside time for reading. Reading was also used by some childminders to help children to sit quietly.

**Story time**

During story time the childminder chose the first book and started to read to the children. It was about a teddy bear that went into space. The childminder had a box with different items in it, and as she read each page a different child took out of the box the corresponding item. For example, the first child took out a teddy bear and the second child a small colander to represent the teddy bear’s space helmet. This continued for the entirety of the book. Afterwards the children were each allowed to choose one book to read.

Childminder, practicing for 7 years

- **Fine motor materials** including blocks, puzzles, jigsaws, manipulatives, shape sorters and marbles. These materials were frequently readily available to the children to use during free play.

- **Gross motor and physical play** including running, climbing, dancing and sports. Childminders generally provided time for outside play especially during the summer. Childminders either provided toys and equipment in their own gardens or took children to local parks. Physical activity was also encouraged in the winter via the use of local play groups with enough space to allow ‘the children to run around and let off steam’.

- **Home-based activities** including cooking, baking and planting. These were activities planned in advance by childminders.

**Planting cress**

The childminder organised all of the equipment needed for the children to plant cress including four small pots, cotton wool, water and seeds. The childminder and children sat together, and the childminder helped the children to plant the seeds by explaining what the children needed to put in the pot first and why. During the activity the childminder asked the
children questions about what they thought the items were for and explained why they were doing each thing (e.g., ‘What do you think this is?’ referring to the cotton wool).

Childminder, practicing for 3 years

- **Messy play** including sand and water play. When messy play occurred in the childminders’ homes it was often during free play as children had access to sand and water in the garden. Messy play was also frequently provided at play groups (which some childminders were involved in running) as a planned activity. Some childminders saw messy play as something that parents often did not offer to their children, thus believing it was important that they provided this opportunity to children.

**Water play**
The child played with the sand and water pit that the childminder had filled with coloured water (using food dye) and bubbles (using washing up liquid). The child used the water to blow bubbles, wash toys and transfer the water from one container to another, which enabled the child to see that one container held more water than the other. The child then drew pictures with the water on the patio.

Childminder, practicing for 2 years

- **Television and computer** were used by most childminders. Television was mostly used as a ‘downtime’ for children after lunch or before their parents collected them. Computers were primarily offered to school-aged children. Based on the observations, some childminders kept the television on for most of the day but children were engaged in other activities most of the time, while others used it for short periods of time to keep children entertained, such as when they were preparing lunch, and yet others did not use it at all.

As mentioned above, activities were offered in childminders’ homes, but also they relied on community resources and community outings including:

- Play groups including library story time, music sessions, soft play, mother and toddler groups and childminder groups
- Local parks and playgrounds
- Going on day trips to places like nature parks or the coast
- Taking the children to the shops. \(^2^0\)

The frequency that childminders used the community resources varied considerably depending on what the childminder could access locally, the timing of local activities and childminders’ and children’s preferences. In some cases, childminders used one or two a day. During holidays childminders noted that

\(^2^0\)It is important to note that those childminders who took children to the shops often highlighted that this was not to do their weekly shopping but to provide children with a ‘real life’ learning experience. For example, one childminder took children to the shops with just three or four items on the shopping list and the children would have to go round and find each item.
they were able to offer daily outings for children, as they were not restricted by school runs.

Parents were also asked about their views around the activities that childminders offered. The mix of activities and outings was appreciated by parents and was one of the reasons parents selected childminders for their childcare needs rather than centre-based care. Some parents particularly liked that children were being exposed to a wide range of experiences and were being encouraged to learn in real life situations. Other parents liked that their children went to different places including play groups that allowed them to socialise with other children.

"Every so often she’ll organise a special day where she will take all of the kids out, you know she will take them for a picnic or something. I think it’s great that because they get to see and experience so much more. ... I love the fact that she takes them to the play groups. That would be something I would do myself so that they can learn to play with others."

Parent, using childminding services for 6 years

### 6.3 Chapter summary

Routines – both children’s personal routines and external routines, such as school runs – dictated the schedule that childminders followed in terms of when and what type of activities they offered, as well as the timing of other routines, such as naps and mealtimes. A variety of activities and materials were offered to children including arts and crafts, music, dramatic play, reading, fine motor, gross motor and physical play, home-based activities such as cooking and gardening, messy play and television and computer use. Childminders relied upon using community resources, such as parks and play groups to support their delivery of childcare. The mix of activities and outings offered by childminders was one of the reasons parents selected childminders for their childcare needs rather than centre-based care.
7 Diversity in childminding practice

In this chapter, we explore differences in childminding practice drawing on childminders’ perceptions of their practice based on interviews and the observed quality of childcare based on observations of childminders. First, we focus on differences in childminders’ accounts of how they organise and deliver their provision in order to support children’s development. Second, we explore the observed quality of childminding practice, particularly focusing on how childminders support children’s learning.

7.1 Planning activities for children

Whilst the daily routines described in Chapter 6 provided a core structure to their day, childminders subsequently tailored their provision to children’s needs, interests and wishes. In order to organise the day and plan for activities, childminders said that they first got to know the children in their care including what their needs were (particularly in terms of routines and developmental needs) and their burgeoning interests.

Some childminders were very systematic in their approach to discovering children’s needs and interests and reported using observations of children to inform their plans of which activities to offer children. For example, one childminder reported using observations of children in free play to inform plans for structured activities.

During interviews, childminders offered many examples of the ways in which they tailored their provision including:

- Recognising children’s interests in a topic and searching for books or additional materials that pertained to that topic
- Incorporating time into the schedule to ensure children get adequate exposure to activities or materials that helped their development, particularly when children seem to be behind in specific aspects of their development
- Working with parents to ensure children received consistent care and learning opportunities between home and childcare
- Encouraging children to use new toys and materials that they may not have experienced before.

One childminder described helping a child with her writing by linking her dramatic play with a till to an actual shopping expedition.

...so with the writing, the biggest thing at the moment with [child] is the writing and the letters, so a lot of the work, the free play we do or any sort of a play that we do I try and encourage the letter formation and letters and all that sort of thing into it... She’s into her till at the moment and shopping and so we can go shopping. If I take them to the shops with me, we have a shopping list, and [child] has oranges and lemons, and she gets to know the start of the letters, so she can then work, apples right, I know where the apples are, and she obviously will go and she’ll go and get
apples, and she’ll read the next one along. She’ll say to me, what’s the next one. I say, right, that’s bananas, and she knows which bananas to go and pick...

Childminder, practicing for 7 years

Childminders very much saw this type of one-to-one tailored provision as key to their practice.

And so the boys probably tomorrow will spend most of the day being builders, then so I suggest, shall we get the bricks out and then you can do some real building? And they like doing writing, which is good, encouraging them to mark make and everything, we’ve got books, we’ve got posters up about builders, all sorts of things at the moment. So we’ve got two that are very into builders.... And then I’ve got a couple of boys that are just, they’re just busy outside, that’s what they want to do, and yeah, we’re outside, which is why I said next week, Wellies. So they’re all very different, so depending on the needs of the children as to what we do, so definitely.

Childminder, practicing for 5.5 years

### 7.1.1 Planning with and for children

Focusing on children’s needs and interests, many childminders worked together with children to plan activities, for example by helping to decide:

- Specific activities or trips they would like to do either in advance or on the day
- ‘Themes’ or ideas for activities (e.g. holidays, seasons, transport, animals) that the childminder could then incorporate into weekly or monthly planning of activities.

However, there was a variation in how childminders worked with children to plan activities. Some childminders simply ensured that a variety of activities and toys were available to children, allowing children to decide which activities to participate in or which toys to use.

*I love free play but I do feel,...if I set something up and they don’t want to do it that’s absolutely fine and I’m really happy with that. And I like to see them mixing what I’ve set up with whatever but I find if you don’t give them a few guidelines they tend to either cling on to you and just stumble, ‘I’m fed up and I don’t know what to do’. So I quite like the, when they come in the morning there’s loads of choice and they’re free but there’s usually something set up in a corner of the room that just challenges them a bit. I don’t know a pile of stones with the diggers or some bark chippings with some dinosaurs or just, just something... That’s there and everything else that they might want is there as well.*

Childminder, practicing for 20 years

Other childminders worked more actively together with children to plan activities where children were encouraged to provide ideas as well. For example, some childminders asked children what they would like to do the next
day or later on in the current day and which toys and materials they should make available. These childminders encouraged children to choose a variety of activities and not to select the same activities all of the time. They also tried to introduce new activities to children in a creative way.

*Sometimes it’ll just be ‘shall we do some painting today’, or ‘shall we do some, we’re going to do some cutting today’ or ‘we’re going to do some junk modelling, what shall we make’? So a lot of the time it’s their choice, it’s not always something specific, it just depends what we’re doing at the time. And also some children are so different. You get the children that love to do their arts and crafts and some that need a bit of encouragement to do it. And it’s not forcing them, this is where this free choice comes a little bit... but I’ve got children that never would have painted if I hadn’t have encouraged them to paint. I had a little boy that didn’t like painting at all and so we got the cars out one day and we did roller painting with the cars and, and he loved it, and he likes to paint now. And it’s not forcing them to do it, it’s just nurturing them into, because if you always let them play with the same thing every time they’re not getting all the other experiences, are they?*

Childminder, practicing for 3 years

These childminders believed that including children in planning activities made them more enjoyable for the children.

*Although we are given ideas in the EYFS and through the NCMA of how to do structural planning and all the rest of it, they [children] get most fun out of it if they’ve been involved from the beginning.*

Childminder, practicing for 7 years

### 7.1.2 Planning learning activities

In this section, we focus more specifically on learning activities. While all childminders offered activities and opportunities for learning on a daily basis, there were reported differences in the degree of planned learning activities: some childminders planned activities in advance on a daily or weekly basis, whereas others did not plan activities in advance but let children decide on the day. Not surprisingly, childminders who generally engaged in advance planning tended to offer more planned learning activities for children. On the other hand, childminders who tended not to plan in advance primarily offered free play to children where children were able to choose what toys and materials to play with. Where free play was the primary ‘activity’, some childminders used free play as an opportunity to facilitate children’s learning (i.e. by guiding their play) and some did not.

In terms of their planning, the childminders we interviewed tended to fall into three groups:

1. Some childminders **planned learning activities in advance** on a daily, weekly, monthly or termly basis including activities to support language development, numeracy (e.g. counting), naming colours and learning about different sizes, shapes and sounds. Even though these childminders planned activities in advance, they maintained flexibility in their approach
and revised their plans as needed depending on children’s emerging needs and interests.

*Thursdays sometimes we visit the market in the morning and buy fruit and veg and come back and match it to all of the posters we’ve got in the kitchen, we’re doing peas this week because children see peas on a plate and they don’t necessarily know where they come from so we bought pea pods yesterday so they’ve been popping those this morning and eating them. The little boy that I did it with [said] he didn’t like peas, he seems to struggle with the skins but of course straight out of the pods that was completely different because they’re tiny and they’re sweet so he’s been doing lots of popping of those this morning.*

Childminder, practicing for 7 years

Even when childminders planned activities including specific learning activities, some did them in such a way that children perceived they were playing.

*I’m not really a lover of worksheets and today we’re going to learn and I hate this we’re going to learn numbers this week. I just feel it all comes through natural day to day activities and just naturally fall into... Play and just going out and about and, oh look there’s three snails there. So you’ve done three that day, but you’re not going to purposely, just three later and three later on, it just when it naturally comes and maybe you have to stage it sometimes. So we were concentrating on learning the number three and so I might leave three fir cones on my doorstep so when they come in the morning they found a group of three...* 

Childminder, practicing for 20 years

2. Other childminders did not always plan activities in advance, but rather *engaged in ‘on the spot’ planning* based on what children wanted to do on the day. These childminders believed that guided free play was an important way of providing learning opportunities and they preferred offering learning opportunities through free play than planning activities in advance. For example, these childminders observed children’s play or conversations and then spontaneously introduced a more structured activity or expanded on children’s interests and learning during free play.

*So we played games to start with and then we had the dinosaurs out and then the older one, the one who’s nearly four, said, ooh look, this one looks like this one, I said, oh yes, so it does. And then so we matched all the dinosaurs into families and counted the dinosaurs, and this one’s big and that one’s small, and why are they different colours? So then we had to go and find a book about dinosaurs to see what colours they were in the book as to what colours they were, the model dinosaurs we’ve got. And then he, and then he said, can we such and, can we have the insects out? The other animals out, he calls them. I said, the insects? And I said, yeah we can have them, let’s put the dinosaurs away. And then we put all the dinosaurs away and he said, I don’t want them now, I want to do this. And so he then went off and we made a road, when we’d sorted it out, we made a Happyland road, which he’s very good at jigsaws and things.*
Childminder, practicing for 5.5 years

I won’t sit there and specially draw out flash cards or get games that’ll lead to them learning, to me it has to be a natural development, so I think instead I’m more likely to sort of we’ll be going off for the walk and we’ll, I’m more likely, say for it was colours, I’m more likely to be pointing out the colours of the leaves on the trees or the colours in the sky so to get them to, to build up a larger picture than think, right this is the activity we’re doing because that child needs to know its colours now and on those cards and on those pictures are those specific colours. To me it works better if you just use what’s around you instead.

Childminder, practicing for 16 years

One childminder felt that children needed a lot of time for free play with a ‘tiny smidgeon’ of adult guidance to give children an idea or something to ‘spark off’, at which point children could ‘run with it’. Another childminder emphasised that free play enabled children to learn at their own rate and that it was the childminders’ job to pick up on when children were receptive to learning something new and to facilitate this learning. As well as making learning fun, childminders saw free play as a way of enabling children to feel like they are in control of their own learning rather than feeling ‘forced’ to learn.

Although it’s free play, it’s imaginative play and also he’s involving you in it as well which is nice, so it’s role play as well. So you’re getting a wide area of what, and you can see what they can and cannot do and also you can see areas in which they may need you to help a little bit more. So you’re watching them and if like, I don’t know, just say for instance with the food and that, if they’re not really comprehending that you can put a spoon in a cup to stir it or you can put the food on the plate, you can intervene but in a way that they don’t know that’s what you’re doing.

Childminder, practicing for 10 years

3. Finally, some childminders rarely planned activities in advance, but rather let children play largely without interruption from themselves. These childminders occasionally introduced new ideas or suggested learning activities. These childminders believed that their role was primarily to provide care rather than a structured learning environment, which was seen to be more the role of schools. The only activities these childminders planned in advance were outings; however, not all outings were specifically for learning, such as when children were taken to playgroups for free play.

The impact of different degrees of advance planning was particularly evident among childminders who had large numbers of children in their care. For example, one childminder who worked with an assistant reported not planning activities or having a structure in the schedule once the school-aged children arrived after school time because the childminder believed that planned activities never worked with a large group. During the observation, the environment was observed to be quite chaotic with lots of children engaged in individual unguided free play. In contrast, another childminder who also worked
with assistants and provided care to school-aged children reported planning all activities in advance and organising which provider led each activity so the children could choose which activity to participate in. This childminder believed it was important to plan this out when caring for a large mixed age group. Even though the observation did not take place when school-aged children were present, the childminder provided consistent high-quality care to the younger children in her care.

Thus, advance planning appeared to be important to ensure children were offered adequate opportunities for learning, particularly when childminders had large groups of children. ‘On the spot’ planning could also be effective, but perhaps worked better with smaller groups.

7.1.3 Planning with flexibility

Whatever degree of planning individual childminders reported, all childminders believed in the importance of flexibility. Childminders gave examples of how as part of their everyday practice, they needed to be flexible with their planned activities and be ready to adapt to changing circumstances or adaptations in children’s needs and interests. Even childminders who engaged in advance planning recognised that some degree of flexibility was necessary to accommodate children not being ‘in the mood’ for a particular activity or feeling tired. Other times, planned activities were extended or evolved into free play or a new activity resulting in the childminder putting their plans aside or reserving them for another day:

I prefer to be able to pre plan and do a structured activity with them but it’s not necessarily that the child needs to be forced to sit at the table and do something. So you just have to go with the flow really and if it’s appropriate you do it, if it’s not you put it to one side and have it ready for another day when the children might be interested.

Childminder, practicing for 2 years

Childminders who planned learning activities in advance always offered alternative activities, usually free play, if a child chose not to participate in the planned learning activity. The child would always be welcomed to join in the planned learning activity at a later stage.

Given the variation in childminder’s accounts of how they organised and delivered their own practice in order to support children’s learning, the next section presents findings based on the observations of childminding homes and examines differences among observed childminding practice.

7.2 Observed quality of childminding practice

As described in the methods chapter (Chapter 2), observations of childminding practice were used to explore in detail an ‘average’ day at childminders’ homes including how they structured their day, how they engaged with children, the range of activities they provided and to what extent they stimulated children’s cognitive development and learning.
In this section, we focus on three aspects of observed childminding practice:

- Tailored provision to individual children’s needs and interests
- Caring relationships between childminders and children, which includes emotional interaction, participation in activities, supervision and discipline
- Learning opportunities provided, which includes communication and language development, activities for learning and cognitive stimulation.

We also explored how well childminders negotiated the above mentioned aspects of childcare when they had a mixed age group of children in care, which is a unique feature of childminding practice, and whether this led to any variations in quality of care and learning.

Building on Chapter 5 on childminders’ beliefs, this section focuses on their actual behaviour. As such, more examples of their practice in action are provided.

7.2.1 Tailored provision to individual children’s needs and interests

As previously described, tailoring provision based on children’s needs and interests was identified as one of the most important aspects of high-quality childminding practice by childminders, and the observations of childminding practice showed that almost all childminders in our study certainly provided this type of practice.

Extending an activity and introducing new learning opportunities based on children’s interests

During free play, the childminder received a text message from her daughter who said she arrived at the train station and was waiting for the train. The children were interested to hear what the text message said so the childminder read it aloud to the children. The children then started making train sounds, and the childminder used this opportunity to ask the children when they were last on a train, where they went and whether they knew a song about trains. The childminder started singing songs about trains. This then turned into a spontaneous activity of singing various songs, dancing, and later playing instruments. While singing and dancing, the children asked the childminder to do the ‘monkey dance’, which involved counting. The childminder sang the song and danced while all children joined in. At the end of each verse, the childminder asked the children to say how many monkeys were left and children shouted the number remaining. In the end, the childminder got out a box of musical instruments, handed out each child a drum and asked them to tap out a number of drum beats (e.g. childminder asked ‘Who can do three?’ and then counting number of drum beats with children).

Childminder, practicing for 16 years

Childminders who tailored their provision allowed for flexibility in the schedule, using the ideas from children to inform subsequent activities. This resulted in smooth changes from one activity to another and from activities to routines, and the change between scheduled activities and routines appeared very
natural and built one on the other. Allowing for flexibility in the schedule meant that new activities were developed as the day progressed, stemming from previous activities that the children had shown an interest in.

**Baking cookies to playing with dough**

The childminder planned a cooking activity. The cookie dough had been made in the morning and was ready for the children to roll and cut shapes out of. The children were having so much fun with rolling out the dough and moulding it into different shapes that the childminder let them continue to do this even though the dough would no longer be suitable for eating. The art pieces made by the children were baked in the oven and then painted once they had cooled down.

Childminder, practicing for 3.5 years

**Eating peas**

The childminder explained to the observer that the previous day during lunch a child had commented on how peas came from a can. The next day the childminder took the children to the greengrocers where they looked at all of the different fruit and vegetables and tried to name as many as possible. They bought some peas to take home and de-shell. As the children shelled the peas they started to eat them raw. Another child asked ‘Where do the pods come from?’. The childminder explained how plants grow and suggested that they keep some of the peas and plant them in some pots the following day to see if they grow into plants.

Childminder, practicing for 7 years

**Posting and opening letters**

During free play, the children started to post things through the bottom of the door. The childminder then gave them actual letters to post under the door and asked them if they would like to help her open letters, which they did, explaining what each letter was (e.g. phone bill).

Childminder, practicing for 3 years

Some childminders were very attuned to children’s imagination and keen for children to express themselves – even during structured activities. These childminders let children’s own ideas and interests structure the activity.

**Creating a jungle**

The childminder organised a jungle-themed arts and crafts activity for two 3-year-olds with animal stickers and coloured pens. The childminder was involved in the activity together with children and asked questions about what the children were doing. The childminder was also holding a toddler who was given an opportunity to explore the sticky part of one sticker. During the activity the childminder discussed with children which animals lived in the jungle and created noises of the different animals for the benefit of the toddler. The children were able to choose which animals to place in their ‘jungles’ including animals that did not typically live in jungles.

Childminder, practicing for 11 years
Creating footprints

The childminder and her assistant (also a registered childminder) involved children in an art activity of creating their own footprints. The childminders placed out a long strip of paper for each child and got them to tread in paint and then walk along the paper, leaving footprints. While the childminders suggested footprints, they allowed the children to choose exactly what they wanted to do. The 2-year-old wanted to paint her hands and repeat the exercise with her hands, while the 3-year-old wanted to paint round her foot. Both of the childminders were very involved in the activity with one childminder painting her feet too and the other letting the children paint his face.

Childminder, practicing for 9.5 years

However, some childminders were less successful in tailoring their provision to individual children’s needs and interests based on data from the observations. These childminders often controlled the type and pace of the activities without focusing on what the children wanted including:

- Insisting on a strict structure of an activity
- Not allowing children’s ideas and interests to extend the activity
- Introducing their own ideas that did not match the activity children were engaged in
- Supervising in a controlling, restrictive manner, which limited children’s freedom and imagination for play.

Insisting on a strict structure of an activity

During the cooking activity the childminder grabbed the cutter out of the 4-year-old’s hands to place it in a particular place on the dough, rather than asking the child to place the cutter in a certain place or to place it where the child wanted. The child just quietly let the childminder cut the dough without objection.

Childminder, practicing for 7 years

Overall, childminders tailored their provision to individual children’s needs and interests with some childminders being able to sustain this child-centred approach throughout the day; whereas others would occasionally appear to be over-controlling or intrusive, which restricted children’s activities and imagination.

7.2.2 Caring relationships between childminders and children

In order to explain what kind of care childminders provided, we focused on analysing observations on childminders’ emotional interactions with children, supervision, discipline and participation in activities with children. As detailed below, childminders were more similar than different to one another when it came to emotional interaction, supervision and discipline and seemed to provide high-quality care overall.
In terms of emotional interaction, some childminders were very responsive to children. These childminders consistently used a warm tone when speaking to children, encouraged children, used lots of praise, were respectful of children and had a positive affect with lots of smiling and laughing, as well as physical affection (e.g. hugs, cuddles, kisses), particularly for younger children. This type of emotional interaction provided children with a warm welcoming environment where children seemed very happy and comfortable being with the childminder.

**High-quality emotional interactions**

During the observation the childminder consistently spoke in a warm tone, smiled, offered encouragement and praise and gave the children physical affection.

For example, the childminder helped the 15-month-old open a bag she was struggling to open. After the childminder loosened the strings the child was able to open the bag and the childminder praised her, ‘well done! what a clever girl!’ and gave the child a hug. The childminder also placed her face close to the young child so that the child could touch the childminder’s face and kiss her. When the young child was sick, the childminder gave her a hug and spoke to her in a soft tone.

Childminder, practicing for 3.5 years

However, a few childminders did not provide positive emotional interactions. These childminders did not interact with children throughout the whole of the observation. There were many instances where they were not paying attention or responding to children’s communication except when children directly tried to get the childminder’s attention or directly asked the childminder questions. These lapses in interaction tended to happen in homes where the childminder primarily observed children’s play (rather than joining in) or where childminders completed housework while minding children.

For the most part, the lack of response and interaction from childminders resulted in children playing on their own or, particularly for young children, sitting and observing other children for long periods of time. Occasionally, children were observed doing misdeeds (e.g. throwing all puzzles and cards in the air), which then got the childminder’s attention. One childminder was observed to be less responsive and harsher with one child in particular compared to the other children. For example, the childminder only answered the child’s questions if he asked them several times and still would respond in a stern voice, and she did not allow the child to participate in activities with the other children. The childminder admitted that she begrudgingly took this child into her care on a temporary basis.

High-quality care was also evident when childminders provided appropriate supervision. These childminders supervised children according to their ages and ensured their environments were safe, but also let children explore independently. Safe environments were those where no safety hazards were observed and childminders used safety practices, such as requiring children to wear helmets when riding bicycles, preventing overcrowding on outdoor equipment and explaining safety rules when using potentially dangerous...
products (e.g. the oven or stove). Childminders also took actions to eliminate safety hazards, such as closing gates of a playground. However, some childminders did not provide appropriate supervision during parts of the observation, particularly when they were doing other activities in the house (e.g. cooking or other housework) for long periods of time or relying on older school-aged children to supervise the younger children. Some childminders were intrusive, restricting children’s activities and limiting children’s independence in play.

Restrictive supervision

The childminder was quite strict about hygiene and safety. For example, she did not let the children run in the park until all of the gates had been shut, she required the children to wash their hands frequently and did not let them mouth or suck on toys. While pretending to be on a picnic, one child dropped a plastic piece of fruit on the carpeted floor and then tried to put it in her mouth. The childminder took the fruit out of the child’s hand because it was dirty.

Insisting on a strict structure of routines

While the children and childminder were getting ready to go to the park, the childminder was firm that the children sat on the step to indicate that they were ready. One child was quietly standing next to the step and the childminder sternly asked him to sit down.

Childminder, practicing for 9 years

In terms of discipline, some childminders did not need to actively discipline or redirect children’s behaviour during the time of the observation, but those who needed to used appropriate behaviour management techniques including redirecting children to safer or more positive activities and explaining to children the consequences of their actions. Effective behaviour management helped children to understand the effects of their actions on others and actively involved children in solving conflicts or problems. However, one childminder was observed using a harsh tone when redirecting children and another failed to intervene when necessary. This led to children being annoyed and angry with the childminder or other children.

Lack of discipline

There were several incidents when the childminder did not intervene to resolve a situation between the children. For example, three children were playing with the puzzles and two of the children tried to complete the puzzle of the third (younger) child, which upset the third child. The childminder sat and watched the children rather than intervening.

Childminder, practicing for 3.5 years

Even though there was a group of childminders who did not consistently provide high-quality care in terms of emotional interaction, supervision and discipline, no childminders were observed to provide none of the three.

Relative to emotional interaction, supervision and discipline, childminders varied in terms of the degree to which they participated in activities with children.
Some childminders participated in activities with children throughout the observation including:

- Participating in activities alongside the children and pausing periodically to engage in conversations with them about, for example, past events or planned activities for the weekend (see Example 1)
- Directly helping children and teaching them how to participate in an activity (see Example 2).

High-quality childminders used both of these techniques with children throughout the observation.

Example 1: various conversations during puzzle time
The childminder conversed with two 4-year olds during free play and while the children played with puzzles. These interactions helped the children to learn new concepts and expand upon children’s interests. One child asked the childminder about the candles in the room (not currently lit) and whether they were completely burned out. The childminder described to the child the concept of time by explaining how long she had used the candles for to date and how they still had some time before they completely burned out. One child asked whether the other child would come over to her house later and the childminder explained that this would be up to their parents to decide. The childminder then extended their discussion about the fact that the children liked to see each other and play together outside of childcare. The childminder then asked the children what they did over the weekend and asked questions about the people the children had seen (e.g. What were their names? How old were they?). The childminder went on to discuss days of the week, asking the children what day of the week it was today and created a guessing game (e.g. ‘Which day comes before Monday?’) and praised children when they guessed correctly.

Childminder, practicing for 6.5 years

Example 2: Den building
The childminder’s assistant (also a registered childminder) set up a den using crash mats, some milk crates and old sheets with one of the children in the yard. Once built, all of the children came over to play in the den. The primary childminder sat just outside the den talking to the children as they gave her a guided tour of their den and pointed out where the window and various rooms were. At one point the assistant started singing ‘little pigs’ and the primary childminder quickly hurried all of the children inside the den before the ‘big bad wolf arrived’. The assistant (who was playing the part of the wolf) tried to blow the children’s den down while asking them questions about what the den was built out of (‘What’s your house made of…straw, sticks or bricks?’). The game continued with the children helping the assistant to knock down the den and asking the assistant to ‘build it again!’.

Childminder, practicing for 16 years

Other childminders who did not display consistently high-quality care participated in activities with children only intermittently during the
observation, such as during story time or when they were caring only for one child. Some childminders mostly observed children play and only occasionally participated in children’s play. These childminders only sporadically communicated with children and were thus more likely to miss opportunities to extend children’s thinking or communication through questioning or commenting. They were also less likely to extend children’s activities in new directions and introduce learning opportunities.

Overall, childminders were more similar than different to one another when it came to emotional interaction, supervision and discipline and seemed to provide high-quality care. When childminders offered high-quality care, children seemed happy and comfortable in childminders’ homes, the atmosphere was pleasant and children were encouraged to explore independently. However, there was more variability in terms of childminder’s participation in activities: some childminders consistently participated in activities with children, whereas others participated less often and, as a result, were more likely to miss opportunities to facilitate children’s learning. While the focus of this section was to describe differences in observed care, the following section presents the detailed examples of how childminders provided learning opportunities for children.

7.2.3 Providing learning opportunities for children

According to the EYFS, all childminders are expected to provide learning opportunities for children in their care. In addition to providing a safe and caring environment, the quality of childcare is often judged by how much learning is offered to children. In order to explore what kind of learning opportunities childminders provided to children, we focused on the observation data on communication and language development, activities for learning and cognitive stimulation.

According to observation data, there was large variation in learning opportunities provided by childminders. Some childminders were very good at providing learning activities and structuring children’s play to facilitate learning, whereas others were less likely to provide such learning activities and tended to miss cues from children.

Childminders who were very good in providing learning activities were observed to do following:

- Communicated with children throughout the day both verbally and non-verbally, encouraged children to talk and responded to children’s communication. Childminders caring for disabled or SEN children used sign language to communicate with children. In one instance, a childminder used sign language with all of the children in her care even though the disabled child was not present during the observation.

- Provided lots of opportunities for language development by extending children’s communication including adding words to children’s statements, asking questions, using descriptive words (i.e. rather than general descriptors, such as ‘it’ or ‘that’) and encouraging more complex communication (e.g. talking about many different topics with children by asking questions and using complex sentences with older children).
Complex communication
During free play the children were talking to each other and to the two childminders. One child started talking about where his parents were that day, and the childminder subsequently engaged the children in a conversation about where their parents or grandparents were and what they might be doing.

Childminder, practicing for 16 years

- Provided learning opportunities by introducing spontaneous activities into children’s play such as counting, naming colours and shapes, recognising letters, naming letters and pronouncing sounds, as well as introducing discussions around past events, weather, family members, food, animals and nature, among other topics. These spontaneous learning opportunities were introduced during planned activities, free play and routines.

Spontaneous counting
Throughout the observation the childminder either initiated or joined in with the children to count different things. For example, they all counted the number of horse shoe tracks along a stretch of path and then counted mole hills in a field. During snack time the childminder asked the 3-year-olds if they could work out how many oat cakes three children would each get if there were six oat cakes in total.

Childminder, practicing for 20 years

- Organising specific and structured learning activities, such as cooking, reading, planting, arts and crafts, puzzle time and going shopping for groceries, among other activities.

These childminders provided varied learning opportunities to all children in their care throughout the observation and rarely missed cues from children.

Providing learning opportunities through children’s play
The childminder provided many learning opportunities during both routines and free play including:
- Counting breadsticks during snack time and counting ladders next to houses during the walk
- Alerting children to different noises they heard outside and encouraging children to identify the source of the noises. For example, the childminder pointed to men working on a house and asked, ‘What’s that noise?’ and the child responded, ‘They are cutting something?’ Then the childminder asked, ‘What can they be cutting?’ and the child responded, ‘They are cutting a house’.
- Discussing what they saw on the walks to and from the playground including the postman (which led to discussion about letters), buses at the car park, a dog in neighbour’s garden, cats, birds, muddy fields, mending a house, workmen on the ladder (i.e. the childminder asked ‘Is he going down the ladder?’).
- Discussing the younger child’s routines and the fact that he was teething, which led to a discussion about children’s teeth.
Childminding practice in England

NCB Research Centre

Childminder, practicing for 5.5 years

For some childminders, learning opportunities were not only offered during planned activities or free play, but also during routines.

Learning on the school run
The childminder talked to the 2- and 3-year-old about the leaves on the ground as they walked to school to pick up the older children. The childminder encouraged the children to pick up the leaves and ‘scrunch’ them up in their hands to experience what they felt like. The childminder talked about the different shapes of the leaves and which tree they came from, and asked the children questions about the different colours of the leaves that they were holding.

Childminder, practicing for 4 years

Learning during snack time
A child asked for a drink and the childminder made suggestions about what the children could have to drink. The child decided to have a hot chocolate. The childminder and two 4-year-old children went into the kitchen to prepare the hot chocolate. The childminder explained what she needed in order to make the drink and talked about each item as she used it. Each child was given a turn to stir the milk with chocolate while it was warming.

Childminder, practicing for 6.5 years

Childminders who were less likely to provide opportunities for learning tended to:

- Miss cues from children (i.e. when children need assistance or when there is a clear opportunity to facilitate children’s learning)
- Provide few opportunities for language development (e.g. asking questions, repeating children’s vocalisations)
- Occasionally or rarely introduce spontaneous learning activity
- Rarely organise specific learning activities.

Lack of learning opportunities for infant
The childminder was always either holding the 8-month-old or very close to him and talked to him but missed many opportunities to extend infant’s play and introduce learning. For example, the infant seemed to enjoy hearing childminder sing, but the childminder only sang for a very short time and did not encourage the infant to join in with movement or clapping. The childminder missed opportunities to talk about concepts relating to counting and measuring (e.g. counting chocolate buttons during snack time). The childminder missed opportunities to extend play and encourage the infant to explore (e.g. singing complete nursery rhymes rather than a snippet, encouraging the infant to press buttons on a toy).

Childminder, practicing for 6 years

Lack of interaction and missed cues from children
When school-aged children arrived from school the two childminders did not offer any organised learning activities for children and tended to interact mostly with the school-aged children. The younger children were often left by themselves. For example, the infant was left on the floor with no toys and no one to communicate with for about 20 minutes until she was collected by her parents. Also, a 2-year-old was left on an adult-sized bench that she could not get down from on her own. The childminders used mostly vague terms (e.g. ‘it’, ‘that’) in communication and tended not to ask the younger children questions. They did not explain their reasons for asking children to stop certain behaviours. The childminders missed cues from the younger children. For example, one child pulled out a game that she did not know how to play and neither childminder helped her with it.

Childminder, practicing for 4 years

These childminders provided some opportunities for learning to children, but did not provide structured learning activities and missed opportunities for learning during free play and routines. Some of these childminders were inconsistent in their care, offering more learning opportunities for some children than to others, especially when there were large groups of children of mixed ages or abilities. Some childminders who did not provide many learning opportunities to children viewed themselves primarily as monitors of children’s behaviour (i.e. to keep them safe) rather than as facilitators of children’s learning.

In summary, our observations showed that there was a large variation in learning opportunities provided by childminders to children in their care, with some childminders consistently providing learning activities and structuring children’s play to introduce learning, whereas others less likely to do so. While many childminders were able to articulate (during interviews) the ways that they promoted children’s learning, the observation findings suggest that some childminders were more successful in putting these ideas into practice than others.

### 7.2.4 High-quality childminding practice

Analysis of the observations revealed that there was a distinct group of childminders who provided overall high-quality childcare, which included tailoring provision to individual children’s needs and interests, providing and facilitating consistent learning opportunities to children and working successfully with a mixed age group of children (if observed). In essence, these high-quality childminders were quite effective at balancing the caring and learning aspects of their care, and saw the two as interlinked. Other observed childminders were less successful in providing childcare where both care and learning were consistently integrated and interlinked in their everyday practice. While some of them provided high-quality care, they did not provide enough learning opportunities for children.

We explored further whether the group of high-quality childminders was different in key characteristics or traits from childminders who were not as effective in providing overall high-quality childcare. These childminders were members of C1, C2 and C3, with the exception of one childminder who did not
fit into any of the four clusters. None of the childminders interviewed were members of C4, which clustered the childminders who had been in the profession for a long time, had the lowest knowledge of the EYFS and the lowest qualifications. Thus, we are unable to conclude whether any C4 childminders would have been considered ‘high-quality’. Interestingly, not all of the high-quality childminders had a Level 3 qualification or above. For those with low qualification levels, however, they did have 6-10 years of experience as a childminder.

The main discerning feature of these high-quality childminders relative to other childminders was that they tended to reflect on their practice regularly and were willing to alter their practice to improve the experiences for children in their care. More specifically, these childminders continuously tried to learn from their experience through, for example, having regular observations and feedback on their practice from their colleagues or network coordinators. Childminders in this group who cared for disabled or SEN children tended to focus on ways to improve their care for these children. These childminders indicated that they would appreciate having more regular feedback from the childcare support workers.

*She [development worker] came to visit me, because I’m doing the networking, so she came and went through all that with me, and I showed her everything I was doing. That is the one thing I would say actually there is not enough funding to support childminders... it would be nice to just have somebody, like you say, come and observe you and say, well have you tried doing that or what about if you put that over there, or did that, or had your sleep area, it would be nice to just have that but there isn’t the funding.*

Childminder, practicing for 3 years

Some of these childminders also reported developing learning goals for children and helping children work towards these goals, ensuring that the activities that they offered to children helped to enforce the learning goals. Some childminders reviewed children’s learning goals with parents, and together they agreed on the appropriate next steps and which activities they could use to facilitate children’s learning.

*The way that we plan is around the children’s interests and we spidergram it into the six areas of learning... for example we’ve just done dinosaurs... for the younger children we’re looking at the colours of the dinosaurs, the texture of the dinosaurs. We’re counting them, we’re collaging them, we’re painting, we’re doing stories. They’re displayed all over the playroom, hanging everywhere. We will play with the dinosaurs in water, in sand. So we’re covering so much but using the theme of dinosaurs... the older ones think it’s fantastic so they’ve made some fantastic enormous box models, they’ve done their own collages, they’ve been on the internet. They’ve been researching. So they’ve learnt some, some geographical things as well as some history there and they’re bringing things in to the setting... So from his initial concept we’ve been able to tick all these different boxes and areas because that’s how it developed... I will do an IEP, an Individual Education Plan and we will meet those specific targets. We’ll discuss it with mum or dad, or both and we will, we will pick...*
out those small steps that we want to work towards... I also highlight all the Early Learning goals that we’re working towards and it’s broken down quite simply so the parents can see what we’re doing, why we’re doing it and where we’re trying to get them. So without even realising it the kid’s having a great time and but we do try and ensure that they do meet the milestones as well.

Childminder, practicing for 16 years

Some of these high-quality childminders had almost 20 years of experience but were still very committed to learning and improving their practice. These high-quality childminders also varied on other key characteristics, such as their qualification levels, Ofsted inspection ratings, job satisfaction, whether they liked the EYFS or not and their commitment to childminding as a professional practice. Thus, there did not seem to be one ‘type’ of childminder based on background characteristics that provided consistent high-quality care and learning. High-quality childminders were, however, consistently reflective on their practice.

### 7.3.5 Impact of having a mixed age group of children

The quality of practice varied for some childminders depending on the overall number and age range of children in their care. When the overall number of children and variability in age range was low (i.e. three to four children under the age of 5 years), childminders tended to provide a good quality care for a mixed age group of young children, where younger children (i.e. infants and toddlers) would be included in all activities with the older children (i.e. 3- and 4-year-olds) at an age appropriate level.

However, in a couple of instances where we observed childminders caring for school-aged children as well as under 5s (i.e. when the age range of children was high), particularly when this led to childminders having a large number of children in their care, the quality of childcare dropped or varied considerably from child to child. Many of these childminders who cared for large groups of mixed aged children had assistants.

Given that high-quality childcare seems to be defined by frequent, consistent and individualised learning opportunities, these childminders who hosted large groups of children, particularly when the age range of children was wide, may not have been able to provide the important aspects of high-quality childcare.

### 7.4 Chapter summary

Both interviews and observations provided a wealth of data on similarities and differences in childminding practice. The largest variation in practice focused around childminders’ provision of learning opportunities for children.

When planning activities for children, childminders familiarised themselves with children’s needs and interests and worked with children to plan activities. In order to facilitate children’s learning, some childminders planned learning activities in advance on a regular basis, whereas others preferred primarily to provide ideas for play to children and enabled children to learn ‘on the go’
through guided free play. Both groups reported being very flexible in their approach and were ready to adapt to changing circumstances in children’s needs and interests. A third small group of childminders saw themselves as carers rather than as learning providers and generally offered unguided free play where guidance or interaction from the childminders was minimal.

The observation data revealed that most childminders tailored their provision to individual children’s needs and interests. Some childminders were able to sustain the individualised approach throughout the day, whereas others occasionally restricted children’s activities and imagination and, thus, provided only minimal facilitation of children’s learning through play. Childminders were more similar than different to one another when it came to emotional interaction, supervision and discipline and seemed to provide high-quality care, on the whole. In terms of participation in activities, some childminders participated in activities with children all the time, whereas others participated less often and, therefore, were more likely to miss opportunities to facilitate children’s learning.

Our observations showed that there was a large variation in learning opportunities provided by childminders. Some childminders consistently provided activities for learning and structured children’s play to facilitate learning, whereas others were less likely to do so. By and large, childminders were aware of the kind of learning opportunities that should be provided to children to promote their development and learning; however, some childminders were more successful in putting these ideas into practice than others.

Regular reflection and a willingness to improve their practice were important aspects of practice among childminders who offered consistent high-quality care. Advance planning appeared to be important to ensure children were offered adequate opportunities for learning, particularly when childminders had large groups of children. ‘On the spot’ planning could also be effective, but perhaps worked better with smaller groups.
8 Childminding and the EYFS

In this chapter we explore childminders’ views on the EYFS, how they learned about the framework, the impact of the EYFS on their practice and their recommendations for the future. Childminders’ relationships with other early years providers vis-à-vis sharing information for children’s EYFS Profiles is also discussed. Data primarily comes from the childminder interviews.

8.1 Views on the EYFS

Almost all childminders found the EYFS a useful framework and saw the benefit of using it. In particular, childminders thought it helped them to do a ‘good job’ by adding structure to their work, provided useful examples of activities childminders could do with children, was child focused and comprehensive and emphasised learning through play, which was seen as the best way for children to learn.

...everything is more planned, more structured, it gives you some really good ideas of what you can do with them, it’s just knowing each child and where they’re at and what you’ve got to do next with them just to help them and the EYFS helps you see all of this.

Childminder, practicing for 6 years

By adhering to the EYFS, childminders felt that they would be viewed in a more professional light among early years providers than they had been in the past. That is, since they are required to follow the same framework as other early year professionals, childminders hoped it would improve their reputation and show that they were not ‘glorified babysitters’.

That’s why now we can’t underestimate childminder because now we are learning and it’s, we are giving them quality equivalent to what the nursery or preschool offers.

Childminder, practicing for 3.5 years

Working to the same framework as other early years professionals was also important to childminders to improve standardisation of care for young children. The aim of the EYFS was described as promoting high-quality care across all early years professionals so that every child has equal access to opportunities.

The childminders who had experience of previous frameworks (i.e. Birth to Three Matters\textsuperscript{21} and the Foundation Stage\textsuperscript{22}) saw the EYFS as the merging of

\textsuperscript{21}The Birth to Three Framework provided support, information and guidance for practitioners with responsibility for care and education of babies from birth until aged 3. It provided information on child development, effective practice, examples of practice that promote play and learning, guidance on planning and resourcing and ways to meet diverse needs.

\textsuperscript{22}The Foundation Stage provided support, information guidance for practitioners with responsibility for care and learning for children aged 3-5 years. Emphasis was upon
these two frameworks, and some viewed the EYFS as an improvement to previous frameworks as it:

- Was just one comprehensive framework as opposed to two
- Was more ‘relaxed’ in its approach for getting children ready for school
- Broke down the areas of learning into six discrete categories, making it simpler to implement.

Even though these childminders had a positive view of the EYFS, some of them still mentioned that they were struggling with some aspects of the EYFS, particularly the paperwork and recording children’s assessments. The ways in which childminders overcame these problems is discussed in Section 8.2.2.

Some childminders felt fairly neutrally toward the EYFS, as they thought that they did not need to change anything in their practice because they were already doing a good job. One childminder believed that she had many years of experience in childcare and that the EYFS just reinforced her practice. Another indicated that she already knew 'everything' from doing her childcare qualifications so she did not feel it was necessary to engage with the EYFS. Interestingly, during observations, both of these childminders were observed to provide high-quality care and learning.

In contrast to the generally favourable (or neutral) view of the EYFS among childminders who were interviewed, there were a few who had relatively unfavourable views. One childminder particularly criticised the focus of the EYFS on children’s learning, as she perceived that the EYFS was describing childminders’ role as teachers rather than as carers. These childminders firmly believed that parents explicitly chose childminders instead of nurseries because these parents did not want their young children to experience such a strong focus on education. This small group of childminders found the EYFS complicated, particularly the paperwork and assessments of children, and did not see the wider purpose of completing the paperwork except to meet Ofsted requirements. They did not change their practice in any way due to the EYFS, as they had always relied on their own skills and experience to offer what they believed to be a high-quality care experience for children. Interestingly, two of these childminders opted out of the observation (following their interviews) and the third childminder was observed to provide relatively low-quality care and learning.

8.1.1 Understanding the EYFS

All childminders described the limited – and often conflicting – information they were given when the EYFS was first introduced. Childminders objected to the fact that they felt they were left to implement the framework without proper guidance. Childminders generally learned about the EYFS through training, which varied in its quality and depth, and their own research.

*When it was first launched there wasn’t very much training involved so this is why it was a shock to a lot of people. Because although I worked under*
Some childminders particularly felt left out of training as they were only offered very short courses. The quality of the training was often described as poor and childminders perceived that the trainers themselves did not appear to understand the framework. Without a detailed explanation of the aims and purpose of the EYFS, childminders initially believed that it was yet another regulation that they had to comply with. Once childminders came to understand that the true objective of the EYFS was for children to learn through play, most childminders were in favour of it.

Some childminders found the EYFS difficult to implement because of the sheer amount of information they received. The guidance was described as a ‘long complicated book’ making it difficult for childminders to take in and remember all of the information in the guidance document. This resulted in childminders referring back to and re-reading the framework frequently, which added pressure to their already limited time resources.

Some childminders indicated that their ultimate understanding of the EYFS came through their own internet research. All childminders reported that they talked with other childminders about how to implement the EYFS and that this was seen as a good way for them to share ideas. For those childminders who found the EYFS quite stressful when it was first implemented, reaching out to other childminders offered them necessary support. Other childminders found the support offered by their local childminding coordinators helpful as they clarified questions and offered encouragement. Some childminders also sought clarification from Ofsted about their requirements as to the amount and level of detail of recording observations that was needed to comply with the EYFS.

8.2 Impact of the EYFS

Among childminders with relatively favourable views of the EYFS, the framework reportedly influenced their practice after a period of adjustment and implementation. In particular, the EYFS introduced new requirements of conducting assessments of children’s progress and paperwork. Since childminders with fairly negative views of the EYFS reported that the framework did not have any impact on their practice (as they chose not to engage with it), this section focuses on the impacts of the EYFS on complying childminders’ practice.

8.2.1 Impact on practice

The EYFS reportedly helped childminders improve their practice by offering them fresh ideas and new perspectives on how to approach and structure their practice and, for childminders who had been practicing for 10 years or more, it reinforced their good practice. This reinforcement was mainly due to the formal focus on learning through play, but these long practicing childminders also reported using the EYFS to get new ideas for activities.
Some childminders started providing more planned activities than they had previously. They believed this additional planning facilitated children’s ability to reach development milestones. Childminders were more conscious of incorporating aspects of the EYFS into their planned activities, which led to more diverse activities on offer.

So it’s, and made me think about planning more I think, I didn’t plan as much. So now I’m thinking, oh, I can do it, oh, I can incorporate that at home or, you know like I said we went to the farm, and just something like they’re washing their hands, if I have the water I can do a little water play thing or get them to play with the soap.

Childminder, practicing for 5 years

The EYFS also enabled childminders to think more about tailoring their provision to children’s specific learning needs when they planned activities. Childminders reported using their EYFS assessments to plan activities for children and help them develop. For some childminders, this planning and assessment process provided an ‘evidence base’ to monitor their practice and its effectiveness and was a source of self-improvement.

... it’s all kind of evidence based and I think it has got its place and I think it’s good. It helps childminders see the progress of the children.

Childminders might know a lot about where a child should be at developmentally but writing it down helps to highlight areas that are not working.

Childminder, practicing for 7 years

Since all childminders initially struggled to understand the framework when it was first introduced, they gave many examples of how it took some time for them to make sense of the framework and learn how to assess children’s development on the six areas of learning.

You obviously make these observations but then it’s finding the relevance to how it fits into the six areas of the framework. It was really difficult at the start, until you know the EYFS really well it is hard to see what you are observing and how it fits into those six areas. Now I know the EYFS I find it quite easy and just one observation will cover all the areas, so it isn’t time consuming.

Childminder, practicing for 2 years

Some childminders with limited formal knowledge of child development found the information provided on the six areas of learning in the EYFS useful in helping them to get an insight into what to expect from children as they developed. There was also a recognition that understanding young children’s developmental milestones could help them to recognise potential problems and issues sooner.

I think the EYFS framework now makes you more aware of what the child, should be attaining and the levels a child should be at and I think it helps you notice things more. Maybe if a child is lacking in knowing their numbers from one to ten you can push it a little bit more or focus on it a little bit more than perhaps you would have done in the past you know.
Childminder, practicing for 16 years

However, some childminders did not believe that they were qualified to track the development of children. For some, this was related to a lack of confidence that they were making the right decisions and linkages between what they observed and what they documented. One childminder also questioned the usefulness of observations for childminders who were looking after children only for a short period of time during the day and felt it was more a burden to do the observations, rather than them being meaningful.

*It’s really hard trying to fit everything in when the children are only here for such a little time. I think it might be easier if they were here all day or all morning, because then you’ve got a structured time to be able to assess what level they are at. But they want to be able to go out to play, and to do certain things and its hard to say no because you want to look at a certain aspect of their development.*

Childminder, practicing for 7 years

### 8.2.2 EYFS Paperwork

In addition to existing business administration and writing daily diaries for children in their care, childminders felt that they had to complete large amounts of paperwork as part of the EYFS. This included writing down observations of children’s progress on their learning goals on a weekly basis (at the minimum) and making sure that their health and safety policies and procedures were up to date.

Almost all childminders reported that there was a lack of clarity around how to efficiently document children’s progress and what information was necessary to document. These findings suggest that some childminders might have been misinterpreting the volume and depth of paperwork that they were *required* to complete. Interviewees pointed out that it would have been very useful to have clearer guidance on how much paperwork (in both quantity and depth) was necessary to complete and to have been given standardised forms to fill in.

Childminders often completed the paperwork during non-working (i.e. unpaid) time, which added several hours to what could already be a long working week. Some coped with the pressure of having to do the paperwork by taking an unpaid day once a week.

Childminders fit into three groups in terms of their perceived difficulty with recording children’s progress (i.e. ‘the paperwork’) as part of the EYFS:

- The first group reported not having any issues with recording children’s progress once they understood the EYFS framework.
- The second group struggled with the paperwork from the beginning and continued to do so. Some had set up systems that were overly complicated and recorded large quantities of information, and were still not confident whether they were recording the right amount of information.
- The final group of childminders had initially struggled with the paperwork but managed to simplify it or come up with their own recording systems.
and, thus, no longer found recording children’s progress challenging. Some of these childminders had administration or training backgrounds and found it easier to create their own forms and systems to record children’s progress. Others used computer packages and QEd tracker books23 to help them record progress of each child. Others minimised the quantity of paperwork by completing observations less frequently and with less unnecessary detail – realising that it was not necessary to document everything, but rather the children’s key developmental milestones.

I used to waffle a lot but now I’ve got it down to one page for a term and lots of photos, and that’s what the parents need, but then I know I’ve ticked enough boxes for Ofsted because you can see that that child has learnt new things.

Childminder, practicing for 5.5 years

However, the ultimate purpose of recording children’s progress was questioned by some childminders. One childminder felt that being able to complete the paperwork to a high standard did not necessarily make for a good childminder. Others felt that recording children’s progress was only a ‘tick box’ exercise that they completed for Ofsted and that one of the main reasons for doing the learning journeys (i.e. sharing information with other childcare professionals) was not being fulfilled.

8.2.3 Sharing information with other childcare professionals

One of the purposes of having a common early years framework is so that individual children’s developmental progress can be recorded and shared among early years professionals, particularly when completing children’s EYFS Profiles before they enter Key Stage 1. The childminders interviewed highlighted that this information sharing rarely happened unless they already had a good working relationship with local nurseries or preschools. It was felt that other early years professional had a negative perception of childminders and were reluctant to share children’s developmental progress with childminders.

I’ve made sure when the children have started preschool I’ve done a transition report for them so that the key workers knows. I have to force my way in and I pin the key workers down and I say, right, I’ve got this, look at it. And it’s obstacle after obstacle all the way where the sharing of information with other settings is concerned. I don’t know whether they just see us as secondary and not on a par with them.

Childminder, practicing for 7 years

Childminders passed on the learning journeys that they completed for each child to relevant staff but often wondered if they were ever read. Again, this led to childminders questioning the purpose of recording children’s progress.

23 QEd publications provide resources for professionals working with the EYFS framework. The tracker books provide relevant information about the EYFS (i.e. the six areas of learning and then space for childminders to capture their observations and next steps for a child.
As part of the EYFS childminders are meant to develop the learning and development goals for children in partnership with other early years professionals. Again, childminders noted that this rarely happened with only one childminder indicating that she went to regular planning meetings at the nursery. Another childminder worried that there was duplication between early years settings in terms of the information they recorded and the learning and development goals they formalised for the children.

Despite childminders’ best efforts to build relationships with nurseries and preschools, they felt that this had had limited impact and they had yet to build positive working relationships with their local settings. Indeed, some childminders reported that they struggled to get Ofsted to see that they were trying to make these links, which is a criterion for inspection, and that it was the other settings who were not willing to reciprocate information sharing.

8.3 Recommendations for changes

Various recommendations were given by childminders as to what could be improved about the EYFS. These included:

- Standardising the paperwork to make it simpler and clearer about what needs to be recorded
- Produce clearer guidance on how to complete the paperwork
- Improve the training that is provided around the EYFS including ensuring that trainers are knowledgeable about the requirements
- Make the guidance on children’s developmental milestones clearer in terms of when childminders should be concerned about a child’s development and who they should contact in these instances
- Build some flexibility into the EYFS for childminders who work from home alone or look after some children for only a short time each week (e.g. reducing the paperwork requirements).

8.4 Chapter summary

Overall, childminders felt quite favourably about the EYFS, as they felt it put them on a par with other early years professionals and helped them improve (or, at least, reinforced) their practice. Due to initial lack of clarity and support, the EYFS was a difficult framework to implement for childminders. Even after a period of adaptation, some childminders still believed that the framework needed to be simplified and that the paperwork used to capture children’s developmental progress should be standardised. Even though most childminders appreciated the usefulness of assessing children’s progress in order to facilitate children’s learning and development, some still struggled with recording children’s progress and were unsure whether they were doing it correctly. The requirement to share information with other settings was challenging for childminders who struggled to be taken seriously by local group settings.
9 Conclusion

This report provided a detailed look at the findings from an 18-month study on childminding practice in England. The results included both survey findings from a national sample of childminders, as well as more detailed evidence from 25 childminders. The research aimed to fill a rather large gap in the evidence base on childminders in England, particularly in terms of understanding childminding practice and childminders’ experiences of the EYFS – generally and its influence on their practice. In this conclusion we thus review some of the key findings from the research.

9.1 Caring and learning

Early years provision is about both caring – offering young children a consistent, one-to-one relationship when their primary caregiver is unable to watch them – and learning – helping young children achieve important developmental milestones. Both of these elements were essential to childminders and, indeed, were interdependent, as childminders did not think learning was possible in the absence of a safe, loving environment.

According to survey data, childminders felt that providing a safe environment where children feel loved, can develop and learn and have their individual needs met was the most important aspect of childcare provision. This view was reinforced in interviews where childminders identified a close, trusting relationship between childminders and children as the core upon which good childminding was built. Establishing this relationship entailed childminders making the children in their care feel that they were part of the childminders’ families, even though most childminders firmly articulated that they were not children’s substitute parents.

Childminders were more similar than different to one another in terms of the ‘caring’ aspect of their provision and were generally observed to be responsive, warm, encouraging and respectful with the children in their care. They also supervised and disciplined appropriately. There was significant variability in the degree to which childminders participated in activities with children, which was also linked to the quality of the learning experiences for children.

Childminders felt that the ‘caring’ aspect of their provision was the key to children’s learning. Indeed, many childminders had difficulty articulating their theories on how children learn and develop, arguing against what they felt was a false distinction between the caring and learning aspects of their provision. That is, if children did not feel confident and secure, they would not open themselves up to learning.

Following this logic, childminders felt strongly that very young children (particularly children under 3 years of age) did not belong in nurseries. Nurseries were seen as too formal, too large and too impersonal. Childminders felt that their service provided the necessary one-to-one attention that young children needed and they saw themselves as the antidote to the overly structured focus on learning they perceived occurred in nurseries. Parents also
highlighted that the mix of activities and informal opportunities for children to learn that childminders provided was an important influencing factor in their decision to use childminders over centre-based care.

To be sure, high-quality childminders were very much in favour of facilitating children’s learning, but they did so by tailoring their provision to children’s needs and interests, extending children’s self-directed play, maintaining flexibility in their schedules and, most importantly, ensuring that learning was fun for children. The very best childminders engaged in spontaneous planning, whereby they changed existing plans or created entirely new plans on the day based on children’s interests. They were also able to switch gears if a new learning opportunity arose. In these childminding homes, children were learning all day through routines and play.

We found that relative to other childminders, high-quality childminders tended to regularly reflect on their practice, seek feedback from colleagues and were very willing to alter their practice to improve the experiences for children in their care. The actions of these childminders were very much aligned with existing quality frameworks for home-based providers (Sandstrom, Moodie, & Halle, 2011). The high-quality childminders each had at least Level 3 qualifications or a minimum of 6 years experience. Encouraging reflection for self-improvement should be incorporated into existing network support.

9.2 Flexible provision

Flexibility – both in terms of their planning and working patterns – was a cornerstone of childminding practice. Childminders varied on the extent to which they planned activities for children. By and large, however, they all indicated that these plans were fluid and could be changed depending on children’s needs and interests. Lots of time was allocated for child-directed free play with some childminders participating in play or extending children’s play in new directions.

According to the survey results, about 8 in 10 childminders offered at least one planned activity per day, but they balanced this with several hours of free play daily. Childminders tended to structure planned activities around routines including school runs and mealtimes. It has been well evidenced that routines are important for young children’s development (Sylva, et al., 2004). When asked about the types of activities they engaged in, almost all childminders read to children, counted with children and engaged in active play on a daily basis. Art, puzzles, blocks, dramatic play, writing, music and home-based activities, such as tidying up or cooking also occurred several times per week. Childminders relied upon community resources, such as parks and play groups to support their delivery of childcare – particularly when they could not provide the resources themselves. Unlike nurseries, childminders were able to take children on outings without weeks of advance notice and planning. Most childminders allowed children to watch television at times. They believed this provided necessary downtime for children, particularly later in the afternoon. Indeed, recent research on practitioners’ perceptions of the EYFS, the childminders in the sample were quite vocal about their belief that children
should have time to relax and play in ‘non-purposeful’ ways (Brooker, Rogers, Ellis, Hallet, & Roberts-Holmes, 2010).

Even among the childminders who planned activities for children, they ensured that their schedules remained flexible and that ongoing activities could be extended to promote children’s learning or that new activities could be developed to sustain children’s interest. Some childminders were less successful in maintaining flexibility in their schedules, as they were observed to control the type and pace of the activities without focusing on what the children wanted.

By and large, childminders were also quite flexible in their working patterns. Based on the survey data, all but a quarter of the childminders in our sample cared for children for 31 or more hours per week – 13 per cent for more than 50 hours per week. Further, about 10 per cent of childminders provided weekend care, 7 per cent overnight care and most opened quite early or stayed open late. Most childminders were registered to care for children from infancy. Childminders thus provide a very flexible service for working parents. Evidence from the 2008 providers survey indicated that relative to other types of childcare providers, childminders were open to care for children for the most hours in a given day and were most likely to be open during school holidays (Phillips, et al., 2009a). Our survey also revealed that, on average, childminders only took 4 weeks annual leave. These findings resonated with the TCRU childminding study from the 1990s (Mooney, et al., 2001).

One of the keys to childminding, then, was flexibility. This entailed adapting to the changing needs and interests of children, but also providing a service that helped working parents with their childcare needs. Some childminders described achieving a great deal of satisfaction through feeling that they made an impact not only on children, but also on children’s families who came to rely on their service.

9.3 The EYFS

According to the survey, more than 80 per cent of childminders were aware of the EYFS (in 2010 when the survey was conducted). The 18 per cent of childminders who were not aware of the framework or only knew little about it tended to be in practice for 11 years or more and have lower qualification levels including less childcare-specific training. In the survey, childminders identified the common framework and guidance for providers as the aspects of the EYFS that they liked the most. About half of the childminders in our sample liked the fact that the EYFS was child-centred and it enabled monitoring and assessment of children’s progress. According to interview data, as well as a recent qualitative study of practitioners’ experiences with the EYFS (Brooker, et al., 2010), childminders very much approved of the ‘child-led’ focus of the EYFS and felt that the framework validated their existing methods of practice. They agreed with its emphasis on learning through play, which childminders saw as the best way to facilitate young children’s learning. Some childminders found it refreshing that the EYFS put them on equal footing with other early years professionals. Working to the same framework as other early years professionals was also important to childminders to encourage standardisation of care for young children.
For some childminders, the EYFS encouraged them to think more about individual children’s learning needs, which then led to more tailored and intentional planning. Some childminders with limited formal knowledge of child development found the information provided on the six areas of learning in the EYFS useful in helping them to get an insight into what to expect from children as they developed. In essence, the EYFS tightened the links between childminders’ planning and children’s development.

Based on interviews, however, childminders felt that information sharing between themselves and other early years providers did not occur unless childminders already had a good working relationship with local nurseries or preschools. It was felt that other early years professionals had negative perceptions of childminders and were reluctant to share information about children with the childminders.

In contrast to the generally favourable view of the EYFS among childminders, a few childminders who were interviewed had relatively unfavourable views. These childminders indicated that they had not changed their practice in any way due to the EYFS. This unwillingness to engage with the framework also suggested an unwillingness to improve their practice.

Childminders did express some concerns about the EYFS, particularly in terms of implementation and ‘paperwork’ requirements. When the EYFS was first introduced all childminders described the limited – and often conflicting – information they were given. Childminders were able to reach out to fellow childminders and, for some, to networks for support. Childminders felt that they had to complete large amounts of paperwork as part of the EYFS. Almost all childminders interviewed reported that there was a lack of clarity around how to efficiently document children’s progress and what information was necessary to document. The recent research looking at practitioners’ views of the EYFS also reported that childminders tended to struggle more with the recording and evidencing aspect of the EYFS than other types of providers (Brooker, et al., 2010). Interestingly in our survey, about 30 per cent of childminders felt that the EYFS requirements to monitor and assess children’s progress was both a benefit and a challenge, perhaps recognising that recording children’s development across multiple domains is useful, but that the work involved in the actual documentation can be onerous. Indeed, when asked about the main reasons that they would stop working as a childminder, about 17 per cent cited the demands of the EYFS. While it might have been that some childminders were misinterpreting the volume and depth of paperwork that they were required to complete, it is important to remember that much of the additional workload is born during childminders’ ‘free time’ when they do not have children in their care. The (unpaid) time commitment childminders perceive they must bear to keep up with the EYFS paperwork is a concern.

Thus, the EYFS seems to be doing a good job in terms of providing a common structure for providers and promoting children’s development, but it is less clear whether it helps to improve the public image of childminding and their joint working with other providers. Perhaps most favourably, the EYFS validated – and even improved – existing practice for many childminders. It emphasised a play-based curriculum and helped childminders better understand young children’s development more formally and incorporate children’s development
into their planning. It appears, then, for committed childminders, the EYFS should improve practice over time, while for those who are quite resistant to the EYFS, it may drive them out of the profession.

### 9.4 Satisfaction and support

Childminders were broadly satisfied with the different elements of their job, with the exception of job security. Given the decline in the number of childminders in recent years (excluding 2011) coupled with the increases in nursery placements, this seems like a reasonable concern. Still, 70 per cent of our sample indicated that they still would be practicing in the foreseeable future. These findings resonate with the TCRU study from the 1990s (Mooney, et al., 2001). Many childminders interviewed very much saw childminding as their chosen profession and were committed to helping to raise its profile more widely. The most satisfied childminders valued their role and saw themselves as making a difference in the lives of children and families. Some childminders suggested that childminding was a stop-gap until their own children were older and they could work outside of the home. Surprisingly, however, this lack of intentionality did not have a discernable impact on the observed quality of their practice.

In terms of sources of support, childminders valued fellow childminders the most, although many of them were members of NCMA and other local organisations. Other childminders were also helpful in providing information about the EYFS to our sample, indicating that their role is more instrumental than just providing emotional support. Thus, any support offered to childminders should include ready access to other childminders including peer mentoring.

### 9.5 Key elements of effective childminding practice

Based on the whole of the survey and qualitative findings, there appeared to be several key elements of effective childminding practice. These elements were reported by childminders in the surveys and interviews, but perhaps more importantly, were also observed in high-quality childminding homes. The elements included:

- Sustaining caring, consistent one-to-one relationships with children
- Tailoring provision to children’s interests and needs
- Maintaining flexibility to be responsive to children’s interests and needs
- Embedding learning in play
- Extending child-directed play
- Using community resources
- Being willing to reflect and change practice.

Ultimately, the key to effective childminding practice was childminders’ ability to make learning part of a caring, close relationship.
9.6 The future of childminding in England

The overall picture that emerged from the findings of this extensive study of childminding practice in England is that childminders are broadly satisfied with their jobs and are adjusting to the EYFS. They are a proud and professional workforce who believe they have a contribution to make to the lives of children and families. The most effective childminders have embraced the EYFS framework. They very much saw themselves as an integral part of the early years workforce, offering provision that is distinct to and, in their view, better than centre-based care for very young children. Childminders’ practice of facilitating children’s learning through play has been formally validated by the EYFS.

Surprisingly though, a solid proportion (i.e. nearly 20 per cent) of childminders in our survey sample were unaware of the EYFS or only knew little about it, and some interviewed childminders were quite opposed to it, which suggests that some childminders may be vulnerable in today’s early years environment. Further, even among committed childminders, many faced an uphill battle trying to work with other early years providers to support children’s learning and development, as the other providers did not necessarily engage with childminders or view them as equals. This latter finding suggests that childminders still suffer a lack of recognition for their work, which was identified in the TCRU study from more than a decade ago (Mooney, et al., 2001).

Our findings reiterated the importance for childminders of balancing the caring and learning aspects of their provision, which perhaps differentiates them from other providers. Childminders also provide a very flexible service for parents including relatively high levels of out-of-hours care. Their long working hours coupled with the unpaid time they spend completing paperwork, which some childminders struggled with, is a possible area of concern.

Nearly all of the childminders surveyed were caring for very young children under 2 years of age, who often are not the focus of discussions about early years provision (vis-à-vis 3- to 4-year-olds). These very young children likely benefit the most from the individual, home-based care that childminders offer. Among the childminders who felt that the EYFS helped strengthen the link between their activities and children’s development, this could prove very beneficial for the youngest children in their care to get the best start in life. More attention should be paid to the care these very young children are receiving including a recognition of childminders’ contributions to their development.
References


Appendix A

Childminding Practice in England survey

The National Children’s Bureau (NCB) is carrying out a research study on childminding practice in England. The study is aimed at providing a better understanding of what childcare provision in home-based settings looks like and how this can be supported.

The study involves a survey with 500 childminders in England and you were randomly selected to take part. The survey should take about 20 minutes to complete. All information collected will be confidential.

Please see the attached information sheet for more information about the study.

About your Service

First of all, thinking about your work as a childminder...

How long have you worked as a childminder? (TICK ONE ONLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than a year</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than a year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify the number of years _______</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What were your reasons for becoming a childminder? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To stay at home with your children</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To work with children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To work in your own home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help working mothers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A friend or acquaintance approached you to look after their children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide company for your own children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be self-employed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another reason (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How many childcare places are you registered to provide for?
What is the youngest age of a child you are registered to provide a place for (even if you do not currently care for a child this age)? (TICK ONE ONLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 year olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 year olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 year olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 year olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 year olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 year olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 year olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 8 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How many children do you currently care for within each of the following age groups? Please exclude any of your own children or your friends’ and family’s children that you are not paid to look after.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>PLEASE WRITE IN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1 year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year olds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 year olds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 year olds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 year olds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 year olds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 year olds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 year olds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 year olds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 8 years old</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are you currently caring for any children that you are not paid to look after, such as your own children or your friends’ or family’s children?

Yes □ No □

If YES, how many of these children that you are not paid to look after are you caring for currently?

And how many of these children are aged under 5?


What is/are the ethnic groups of the children you currently care for? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>□</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White European</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ethnic backgrounds (please specify)</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you care for any children with special needs? (TICK ONE ONLY)

Yes □ No □ Don’t know □

Do you care for any disabled children? (TICK ONE ONLY)

Yes □ No □ Don’t know □

Which days of the week do you provide care? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>□</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average, how many hours do you work as a childminder on typical weekdays (Monday to Friday)? If the hours vary, please estimate the average number of hours per weekday.


On average, how many weeks per year do you have off from providing childcare (e.g., for vacations, holidays)? (TICK ONE ONLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 weeks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you offer care during the following times? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 8am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 7pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overnight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And on average, what is your hourly rate per child?

[Blank]

Are any of your fees currently covered by the Free Early Education entitlement? (TICK ONE ONLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Provision of Care

In your opinion, how important are the following features of childcare provision in terms of the overall quality of care – on a scale of one to ten, where one is 'not at all important' and ten is 'very important'... Keep in mind we want to know your opinion. (CIRCLE ONE RATING FOR EACH)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Providing a safe physical environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Communicating with parents about their children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Experience in taking care of the children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: Teaching children to get along with other children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: Sharing parents’ values</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Qualifications and training in taking care of children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: Teaching of cultural or religious values</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H: Caring for children in a home environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Making children feel loved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J: Helping children develop and learn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K: Preparing children for school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: Meeting individual children’s needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Providing affordable care</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N: Providing children with opportunities to make choices</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How many activities do you usually plan for children? (TICK ONE ONLY)

| Several per day | □ |
| One per day     | □ |
| Two to four per week | □ |
| One per week    | □ |
| I don’t plan any | □ |

On average, how much time per day do children in your care spend in free play (i.e., not involved with any planned activities)? (TICK ONE ONLY)

| Half an hour | □ |
| One hour    | □ |
| A couple of hours | □ |
| Half a day  | □ |
| All day     | □ |

In a typical month, how often do children spend in the following activities (either indoors or outdoors)? (TICK ONE ONLY FOR EACH ACTIVITY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A: Arts and crafts activities (e.g., painting, colouring, collage, beading etc)</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Less than once a week</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>Two to four times a week</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B: Puzzles</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Blocks/construction materials</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: Sand/water play (during summer)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: Fantasy play/make-believe play</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Stories/reading</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: Writing</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H: Counting</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Music</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J: Home-based activities (e.g., tidying up, cooking, folding clothes)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K: Gross motor activities (e.g., running around, climbing, sliding, playing with the ball)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: Watching TV</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have you taken the children to any of the following places in the last three months? (TICK ONE ONLY FOR EACH PLACE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A (Don’t have access to it)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Local park/Country park/woods</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Playground</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Zoo/Farm</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: Seaside</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: Library</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Museum</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: Playgroup or other clubs (e.g., One o’ clock clubs)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H: Children’s centre (e.g., Stay and Play)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Local shops</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here are some statements other childcare providers have made about caring and educating children. Please indicate how much you agree with each statement. (TICK ONE ONLY FOR EACH)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Mildly agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Mildly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Children should be allowed to disagree with carers if they feel their own ideas are better.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Children learn best by doing things themselves rather than listening to others.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Children have a right to their own point of view and should be allowed to express it.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: Children like to teach other children.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: It’s all right for a child to disagree with his/her carers.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Carers should go along with the game when a child is pretending something.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: What carers teach children is very important for his/her school success.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H: A child’s ideas should be seriously considered in making decisions.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationship with parents

Thinking about your relationship with parents, please indicate how often any of the following happen... (TICK ONE ONLY FOR EACH)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Parents spend time in your home with their children</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Time is specifically set aside at mornings and going home times to allow parents to discuss their children</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Parents share their observations of what children say and do in their own home</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: You use parents’ observations to determine how you plan activities for children</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
E: You give parents informal support for their children’s learning in their own home (e.g., book borrowing, ideas for places to visit, tips on activities to do at home)

|                                         | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Have you had incidents which caused tension in your relationship with parents around any of the following... (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

|                                         | ☐ |
| Parents’ time-keeping                   | ☐ |
| Your time keeping                       | ☐ |
| Late payment by parents                 | ☐ |
| Agreeing the rates and terms of payment | ☐ |
| Children being taken sick while in your care | ☐ |
| Parents bringing sick children in to your care | ☐ |
| Feeling of being ‘taken for granted’ or not feeling appreciated for what you do | ☐ |
| Anything else that has caused tension (please specify) | ☐ |
Commitment to childminding

How likely will you be to continue working as a childminder? (TICK ONE ONLY FOR EACH)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Likely</th>
<th>Fairly Likely</th>
<th>Fairly Unlikely</th>
<th>Very Unlikely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: In the next year</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: For the next 3 years</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: For the foreseeable future</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What would be the main reason to stop working as a childminder? (TICK ONE ONLY)

- Retirement
- Another job not related to childcare
- Another job in childcare
- Needs of my own children
- My children starting school
- Demands of the Early Years Foundation stage (EYFS)
- Another reason (please specify)

Please rate how satisfied you are out of ten with the following aspects of your job as a childminder, where 1 is ‘not at all satisfied’ and 10 is ‘completely satisfied’… (CIRCLE ONE RATING FOR EACH)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all satisfied</th>
<th>Fairly Unlikely</th>
<th>Completely satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: The recognition you get for your work</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Earnings</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Job security</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: Working hours</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And on the same scale, how satisfied are you working as a childminder in general? (CIRCLE ONE ONLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all satisfied</th>
<th>Fairly Unlikely</th>
<th>Completely satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Membership of childminding networks and sources of support

Are you a member of any of the following childcare organisations? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Childminding Association (NCMA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local childminding association/organisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school Learning Alliance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Day Nurseries Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another childcare organisation (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are you a member of any of the following childminding networks or groups (either formal or informal)? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network or Group</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local childminding group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group organised by Children’s Centre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Childminding Association (NCMA) coordinated network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority coordinated network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another childminding network or group (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you sought help or advice with childminding from any of the following sources?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not available in my area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Another childminder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA Advisor (e.g., Childcare Coordinator or Childminding Development Officer)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Childminding Network (NCMA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Visitor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network coordinator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sought any help or advice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another source of help or advice related to childcare (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average, how satisfied are you with the level of support you receive for childminding? (TICK ONE ONLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction Level</th>
<th>Not satisfied at all</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Early Years Foundation Stage**

How much do you know about the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)?
(TICK ONE ONLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Aware of it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Know it very well</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know a fair amount about it</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know a little about it</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have heard of it but know nothing about it</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have never heard of it</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If one of these ticked please go to question #33

If one of these ticked please go to question #36

Which trainers or organisations have been most helpful to you in getting to know more about the EYFS? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Aware of it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority/Council</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My childminding network or group</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My childminding network coordinator</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Childminding Network (NCMA)</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other childminders</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Centre</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own work or research</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private provider</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic course</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other source (please specify)</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What do you like the most about the EYFS? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It provides a common framework for providers</th>
<th>☐</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It provides guidance for providers</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It promotes a professional image for childminders</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its child-centred focus</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its play based focus</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It improves quality care for all children</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is good for working with parents and other professionals</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It enables monitoring and assessment of children’s progress</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It improves overall learning and outcomes for children</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other positive(s) (please specify)</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which of the following do you find most challenging when working within the EYFS framework? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

| Lack of time to fulfil all requirements       | ☐ |
| The amount of paperwork                       | ☐ |
| Requirements to monitor and assess children’s progress | ☐ |
| Ofsted inspections                            | ☐ |
| How to link/exchange information with other settings/schools | ☐ |
| Difficult to engage with parents              | ☐ |
| Negative media coverage of EYFS               | ☐ |
| Negative exchange among other childminders    | ☐ |
| Anything else (please specify)                | ☐ |
### Background information

Qualifications are often classified by their level. What is your highest qualification at the following levels? (TICK ONE ONLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL 2</td>
<td>which includes 5 GCSEs Grades A-C, 5 GCEs O Level, NVQ Level 2, 1 A Level, 3 or fewer AS Levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL 4 &amp; 5</td>
<td>which covers Undergraduate of First degrees and postgraduate degrees including PGCEs, Masters and Doctorates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL 3</td>
<td>which includes 2 or more A levels, 4 or more AS levels, GNVQ or BTEC National and NVQ Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL 1 qualifications</td>
<td>for example GCSE Grades D-G, CSE Grade 2 or under, GNVQ/GSVQ Foundation, BTEC First, NVQ Level 1 or less than 5 GCSE Grades A-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry level qualification</td>
<td>for example City &amp; Guilds certificate or BTEC certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other qualifications</td>
<td>(please specify type, grade and level of the highest qualification you have)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you have any of the following qualifications related to childcare? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

- Introduction to Childminding Practice / Introduction to Childcare Practice (ICP)
- Certificate in Childminding Practice (CCP)
- BTEC National Award, Certificate, Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development - Level 3
- BTEC National Certificate, Diploma in Childhood Studies (Nursery Nursing) - Level 3
- CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Home-based Childcare
- NVQ Level 3 in Children's Care, Learning and Development
- NVQ Level 4 in Children's Care, Learning and Development
- NNEB Certificate/Diploma in Nursery Nursing
- Another childcare qualification (please specify)
- Don’t know

Are you Female or Male? (TICK ONE ONLY)

- Female
- Male

What is your age in years?
Please indicate your ethnicity (TICK ONE ONLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White European</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is your current marital status? (TICK ONE ONLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with a partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/In a civil partnership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That is the end of the survey. We would like to thank you very much for your time and help.
Appendix B

Childminder interview topic guide

INTRODUCTION
- explain who NCB, funder and aim of study
- explain:
  - issues to cover
  - confidentiality/anonymity (including how applies to this study and limits)
  - duration of interview
  - recording (including permission)
  - reporting (including anonymity in reporting, use of quotes)
  - no right/wrong answers - want to hear own views/experiences. Right to refuse to answer any question
  - any questions (also outline opportunity to ask questions at end of interview)

BACKGROUND

Purpose: Warm-up, clarifying the information provided in the questionnaire and providing context for later stages of the interview. If short on time, cover quickly (we have much of this information from the questionnaire and recruitment screening questions)

- about the childminder (briefly)
  - how long worked as a childminder
  - relevant qualifications (childcare/other)
  - membership of any childminding organisations/networks
  - reasons/motivations for becoming a childminder

- about the service (briefly)
  - how many children currently caring for
    - characteristics and needs
    - length of time with childminder
  - how long been working with the under fives; how has this varied over time
  - working patterns/services offered
    - standard hours
    - wrap around services (including school drop off/pick up services, early/late opening, weekend working)
    - weeks per year worked
    - cover for school holidays
    - annual leave taken
    - acceptance of the Free Early Education Entitlement (where proportion of fees are covered for 3-4 year olds); employer childcare vouchers
    - any other services provided
  - has services offered changed over the past few years
  - when last inspected
PRACTICE

Purpose: Encourage detailed coverage of their childminding practice. Probe to gain rich description of practice, views on quality and perceived differences between childminding and other caregiving environments.

- **key features of childminding/caregiving practice**
  - how would they describe their everyday practice (e.g. routines; what activities do they undertake with the children etc.)

*If it helps, ask the childminder to describe a ‘typical day’ using the prompts below to cover key elements of the day, probing for more detail and examples as appropriate.*

  - greetings/departures (how children settled/prepared for leaving, interaction with parents etc.)
  - everyday routines (school drop/pick up, nap times, attending play groups etc.)
  - mix between structured activities and free play, including:
    - degree to which children can chose to participate in structured activities
    - degree of choice in free play; whether they structure/participate in free play
    - importance childminder attaches to a) structured activities and b) free play
  - what activities they make available for children (why, examples, any constraints experience when planning for activities, how overcome)
  - what equipment/toys they make available for children (why, examples)
  - mix between outdoor and indoor play/activities (what mix, reasons why)

➢ If caring for mixed ages/abilities

  - how cater for mixed ages/abilities and interests (examples; do they experience any problems planning for these groups; how overcome)
  - whether they encourage/support older children to help younger children learn

- **view of ‘quality’ childcare**
  - own views on what makes a ‘good’ childminder; what does ‘good’ and ‘poor’ quality look like; what do children need to ensure that they get off to a good start in school

*If proving difficult to elicit response, use the prompts below and/or ask the childminder if they themselves were looking for a childminder, what qualities would they look for. Explore why a sign of ‘good’ or ‘poor’ quality (incl. what difference does this make & how the childminder has learned these things).*

  - personal attributes
- qualifications/training
- experience/length of service
- childminders own experience of parenting
- communication/relationship building skills (with children and parents)
- knowledge of child development, how children learn
- caregiving environment (incl. important features, what difference can this make for children, parents)

- what do they themselves do to provide ‘quality’ childcare (examples/what make this a ‘quality’ care experience, who for whom e.g. child, parent)
- what does the childminder see as the main purpose(s) of their role, for example:
  - service for families (incl. allowing parents to work)
  - to prepare children for nursery/school
  - to support children’s social development, provide them with skills to learn
  - pre-school/early education
  - ‘home from home’
  - safety/safe environment
  - child-centred/child-focused
  - provide love and care

> If looking after disabled/SEN child (make sure you ask these set of questions, specifically in relation to what support the childminder may receive or would like)

- what implications does this have for ‘quality’ (e.g. does this change ‘quality’ in any way; requires different skills, experience, environment resources, support)

- views on the balance between learning and caring aspects of childminding provision
  - what balance between learning and caring does the childminder seek to strike (reasons why; does one factor take precedence over another; why)
  - are there any tensions between learning and caring aspects of provision (why tensions, how overcome)
  - influence/role of the EYFS on the balance between learning and caring aspects of provision

- views on how childminding is different from other types of early years provision
  - views on childminding and how it compares to other types of early years provision
  - the role of the home environment in childminding practice (implications for caregiving practice, children’s development, learning, enjoyment)
  - boundary between family life and childminding
    - to what degree, if any, does childminding practice affect personal/family life (any tensions, how resolved/managed)
    - degree to which the family support the childminder and their work

- views on how children learn and development
  - views on the ways in which children develop/learn (e.g. formalised/structured approach v ‘learning through play’ ethos)
- views on balance between caregiver and child-led activities to optimise learning (what do they think the correct balance is, how achieve this in their own practice/who ‘drives’ the schedule in the setting)

- how is their thinking around how children learn informed (e.g. own values/experience of parenting, training, own observations of ‘what works’)

- how do they think their childminding practice supports children’s learning and behaviour (any examples of specific practices/how do these link in/support EYFS learning goals)

- **relationship with parents (if not already cover in ‘practice’ section)**
  - childminders overall view on how they work with parents
  - how do they manage/negotiate the relationship with parents (any tensions; how managed)
  - the extent to which they personalise their care based on what parents want
  - how is information shared between childminder and parents (what information; how used by childminder e.g. to plan activities, to support children’s learning at home)
  - extent parents involved in setting learning/development goals (how informed/involved)
  - what do childminders think parents want from their childminder (e.g. care v early years education/learning, a combination; why)

**EXPERIENCE AND VIEWS OF EYFS**

*Useful to have a copy of the EYFS learning goals to hand for reference*

- **experience of EYFS**
  - what do they know about the EYFS (how did they find out about EYFS, have any trainers/organisations/other childminders helped them to get to know more about it)
  
  - how would they describe the EYFS
    - how do they interpret the focus of the framework
    - what benefits does it bring to own practice (image of childminding, focus on ‘quality care’, monitoring and assessment; examples)
    - what are the challenges in working within the EYFS framework (examples/how overcome)

  - to what extent has EYFS influenced their day-to-day practice (examples; what implications has this had for their practice)

  - how incorporated/integrated EYFS into own practice
    - extent to which practice had to adapt (planning/assessment/style of care giving/resources/curriculum; examples)
    - what worked well (what enabled this)
    - any issues/challenges (how overcome)
- views on potential changes to EYFS (most likely result will be a tiered system where different rules apply for childminder compared to centre-based carers)
  
o how do they record progress of children (what do they view as the most important aspects of development to record/how influenced by EYFS learning goals)
  
o key recommendations for future of EYFS – what should stay, what should go, what else is needed

➢ **ONLY COVER IF TIME** - If childminder has been inspected since the introduction of EYFS e.g. last two years

- **experience with inspection**
  
o how would they describe the process of inspection (process, who involved, time taken, views on process, what worked, challenges encountered, how overcome)

**QUALIFICATIONS/TRAINING**

➢ **ONLY COVER IF TIME** - we already have some details on this from the survey, if running short on time, concentrate on ‘Support’ section (page 6)

- **overall views on qualifications and training**
  
o views on whether need formal training or qualifications to be a childminder (if yes, what training/qualifications; if no, why not)
  
o views on importance of qualification and training v experience of taking care of children
  
o views on importance of childminders accessing regular training/study (including enablers and barriers to training)
  
o what could be done to support childminders training needs (what support would be most useful and why, how could any barriers to training/study be overcome)
  
o what do they think are the most important aspects of their practice; is this amenable to training

**SUPPORT**

*Focus on both formal and informal support in terms of a) childminding practice and b) in relation to understanding and implementing the EYFS.*

- **membership of childminding organisations/networks**
  
o which organisation/association(s)
  
o nature/level of support received (how helpful/accessible)

- **who turn to for support** (formal and informal support)
  
o who do they turn to for advice/support/help with:
    - **childminding practice** (other childminders, LA advisor, NCMA, health visitors, family, others)
    - **understanding and implementing the EYFS** (other childminders, LA advisor, NCMA, health visitors, family, others)
For each kind of support, probe whom they turn to for which kinds of issues/problems. Probe degree to which help/support receive useful, accessible etc.

- what further support would they like to see (who provided by, nature of support, what difference would this make)

**FUTURE PLANS AND COMMITMENT TO CHILDMINDING**

*Closing section: Select as appropriate, depending on what issues they raised earlier.*

- future
  - future plans for training/development (if yes, what plans and reasons for; if not, why not)
  - how satisfied with childminding (what like/dislike about childminding, examples)
  - plans to continue with childminding (how view childminding e.g. longer term career/business, stop-gap, stepping stone to related work)
  - would they recommend childminding as a job to someone else (if yes, why; if not, why not)
  - views on the Early Years entitlement
  - views on the EYFS and childminding
  - views on the future of childminding (does childminding still have a role to play in the mix of childcare/early years provision)
  - anything else you think we should know

Thank them for their time. Now provide opportunity for them to ask any questions they may have. Give reassurances re: confidentiality, what will happen next. Explain arrangements/how will be contacted for the observation:

- observation takes around 2 hours; will involve one researcher
- we would like to time our observation on a ‘typical’ day

if required, gather some possible days/time and advise childminder they will be contacted asap to confirm arrangements.
### Appendix C

**Main scales, subscales and indicators from childminding observation instrument**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of providers present:</th>
<th>Age range of children present:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of children present during observation:</td>
<td>Describe any other family members present (who, for how long, etc.):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children with identified disabilities (describe):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of practice (opening hours, #enrolled, mix of age groups, etc.):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General schedule:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Space and furnishings: These subscales focus on the physical environment of the childminding home.

#### 1. Space
- Number of rooms (for childcare) and purpose
- Layout and organisation of space (e.g. are there distinct ‘areas’ such as for blocks, reading, etc.; is space arranged so childminder can supervise children by sight or sound; separation of childminder’s regular living space space for childcare)
- Availability of outdoor space

If relevant:
- Cleanliness
- Natural light
- Ventilation and temperature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describe general layout of childcare space:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the layout conducive to supervising children?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes and overall impressions:**

#### 2. Furniture and displays
- Availability of child-size furniture and accessories
- Whether furniture promotes self-help (e.g. steps near sink)
- Describe displays (e.g. whether children’s own work, pictures or photos are displayed; whether displays are located where children can see them)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brief description of furniture focusing on whether child-sized and promotes self-help:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief description of displays:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes and overall impressions:**
**Personal care routines:** These subscales focus on the routine activities and personal care procedures.

### 3. Greeting/departure and info sharing with parents
- Describe arrival/departure (i.e. what happens, tone)
- Describe how children are settled in
- Describe information sharing between childminder and parent

### 4. Meals and snacks
- Schedule and organisation (e.g. whether food prepared in advance, childminder eats with children, etc.)
- Type of food/drink served
- Sanitary procedures
- Atmosphere and conversation
- Encouragement of learning (e.g. naming foods for infants/toddlers, self-help, food preparation)

### 5. Health and safety
- Storage of harmful substances (e.g. medicines, cleaners)
- Accessibility of unsafe equipment, surfaces, materials
- Presence of safety equipment (e.g. stair gates, window guards, first aid kit)

If relevant:
- Neighbourhood safety

**Notes and overall impressions:**

**Specific safety hazards:**
- **Indoor:**

- **Outdoor:**

**Notes and overall impressions:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Children’s cognitive development:</strong> These subscales focus on the activities, materials, opportunities and support children receive for cognitive development.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Cognitive stimulation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Quantity and content of childminder’s communication with children (during routines and play)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether provider adjusts complexity of language to match children’s abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use of descriptive words (vs. ‘it’, ‘that’, ‘this’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Encouragement, responsiveness and acknowledgement of children’s communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Encouragement of more complex communication (e.g. adds words, asks questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Appropriateness of childminder’s language and grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether children are encouraged to talk freely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether childminder teaches children or extends their play (i.e. scaffolding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether childminder misses cues to stimulate children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Notes and overall impressions: |
### 7. Reading and literacy
- Availability and accessibility of developmentally appropriate books and other materials (e.g. quantity, content)
- Use of books by childminder (one-to-one and group)
- Encouragement of children’s involvement during book reading
- Encouragement of children’s ‘reading’
- Encouragement of children to recognise letters and printed words
- Availability of writing implements and materials
- Encouragement of children’s ‘writing’

Types of books available (including diversity, range of topics, fiction, factual, for different age groups, etc.):

Describe any reading or literacy activities observed:

**Notes and overall impressions:**

### 8. Counting, measuring and shapes
- Availability of developmentally appropriate counting and measuring materials and shapes
- Whether childminder talks about concepts related to counting and measuring
- Whether childminder names shapes and draws attention to shapes and their properties

Types of math and number materials accessible:

Describe any maths or counting activities observed:

**Notes and overall impressions:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>9. <strong>Science and nature</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Availability of developmentally appropriate science/nature materials and living things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Provision of outdoor experiences with nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Whether childminder shows interest in nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Use of everyday events as a basis for children to learn about nature (e.g. weather, feeding pets)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Whether science activities are offered to older children (e.g. cooking, simple experiments, planting)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Types of science/nature materials accessible (e.g. natural objects, living things, science tools, books, pictures, toys, etc.):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe any science/nature activities observed:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes and overall impressions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Materials and activities to learn and grow:** These subscales focus on the availability and use of materials, activities and play to stimulate children’s learning and development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>10. <strong>Fine motor materials, puzzles and blocks</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Availability of a range of developmentally appropriate fine motor materials (e.g. rattles, nested cups, stringing beads, manipulatives, building toys, etc.), puzzles and blocks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Involvement of childminder in children’s play</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Types of materials accessible (e.g. building toys, manipulatives, puzzles, blocks, etc.):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes and overall impressions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11. <em>Art, music and drama</em></strong></td>
<td>Types of materials accessible:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes and overall impressions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>12. <em>Use of TV, video and computer</em></strong></td>
<td>Times children use TV/video and computer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes and overall impressions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>13. <em>Active physical play and equipment</em></strong></td>
<td>Space used for active play:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type (and appropriateness) of equipment available:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes and overall impressions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Interaction:** These subscales focus on childminders’ interactions with children and how they encourage children’s social development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>14. Supervision</strong></th>
<th>Notes and overall impressions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Appropriateness of supervision based on age and abilities of children</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Whether supervision is negative and/or overly controlling</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How childminder coordinates caregiving with other responsibilities</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Whether childminder allows children to explore independently</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>15. Childminder-child interaction</strong></th>
<th>Notes and overall impressions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Whether childminder participates in activities with children</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Describe tone of interactions between childminder and children (e.g. warmth, harshness)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Responsiveness to children</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Describe physical contact between childminder and children</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Whether childminder listens and shows respect for children</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Describe how childminder redirects and disciplines children</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Whether childminder helps children understand the consequences of their actions</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Whether childminder has realistic expectations for children’s behaviour</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Provision of opportunities for children to be successful</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Whether childminder is intrusive</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Whether childminder is child-centred</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
16. **Interactions between children**
- Encouragement of children’s interactions with one another
- Facilitation of positive peer interactions
- Describe how childminder handles negative peer interactions

Describe provider-initiated activities that encourage children to work or play together:

**Notes and overall impressions:**

---

**Programme structure:** These subscales focus on the degree of structure in the schedule and the balance between free play and group activities.

17. **Schedule**
- Describe daily schedule
- Describe whether schedule meets individual children’s needs (i.e. who ‘drives’ the schedule?)

Notes and overall impressions:

18. **Free play**
- Describe free play
- Frequency of free play
- Facilitation of and involvement in children’s play (e.g. help them get materials they need, encourage children to talk about their actions, etc.)

Notes and overall impressions:

19. **Group activities**
- Describe group activities (i.e. for learning and play, not routines)

Notes and overall impressions:

---

**Context and other useful information**
*If appropriate, briefly note any particular events/circumstances on the day of the observation and other comments not included above. Also include your overall impressions or 'take home' messages from the observation.*
Appendix D

Parent interview topic guide

INTRODUCTION
- explain who NCB, funder and aim of study
- explain:
  - issues to cover
  - confidentiality/anonymity (including how applies to this study and limits)
  - duration of telephone interview (20-40 minutes max)
  - recording (including permission)
  - reporting (including anonymity in reporting, use of quotes)
  - no right/wrong answers - want to hear own views/experiences. Right to refuse to answer any question
  - any questions (also outline opportunity to ask questions at end of telephone interview)

BACKGROUND
Purpose: Warm-up, gather relevant background information and providing context for probing at later stages of the interview.

- about the parent and their children (briefly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee's occupation &amp; if work full/part time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If applicable, partner's occupation &amp; if work full/part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many children under five</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- about the childcare service they receive (briefly – not all questions will be applicable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How long have they been using the services of a childminder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of time with current childminder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under fives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many under fives currently attend a childminder’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattern of attendance e.g. full/part time, how many hours and days per week, cover for school holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you using any other childcare services in combination with a childminder e.g. nursery, pre-school, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over fives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many of their children 5 and over attend childcare services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHY CHOOSE CHILDMINDING FOR THEIR CHILDCARE NEEDS

- reasons for choosing a childminder
  - main reasons/motivations for using the services of a childminder
  - why chose to use the services of a childminder
    - was it your first choice (if so why; if not, what other kinds of care did you consider and what influenced your final childcare decisions)
  - why choose childminding for their childcare needs over other forms of childcare for...
    a) children under five
    b) If applicable...children over five years

If using a childminder in combination with other form(s) of childcare...

- Main reason(s) for using a combination of childminding with other form(s) of childcare; what influenced the decision; what, if anything, can other forms of childcare provide that childminding can’t

- how did you go about finding a childminder
  - where did you go for information/advice, how helpful

- what influenced your choice to use services of a childminder
  - cost of childcare
  - convenience (e.g. location of childcare to home/work, child’s preschool etc.)
  - trust (e.g. in childminder, childcare environment)
  - acceptance of the Free Early Education Entitlement or employer childcare vouchers
  - recommendations – friends, family, other
  - flexibility of childminder (e.g. willingness to accommodate parents working patterns, shift working, degree of flexibility with drop off and pick up times etc.)
  - provision - style of care/style of learning/educational opportunities
  - safe environment for children
  - home from home environment (probe what influence the home environment has on parents decision to use services of childminder)
  - personal qualities of the childminder (e.g. humour, patience, rapport with parents/children etc.)
  - qualifications of the childminder
  - childminders own experience of parenting

Probe what factors/elements are more or less important to parent and their reasons why as appropriate. Any factor in bold, always probe.

- what makes a good childminder/what makes a bad childminder
  - own view of what makes a ‘good quality’ childminder (and what makes a poor quality childminder); what qualities and aspects of a childminders
service are important to you; what do children need to ensure that they get off to a good start in school and how can a childminder support this.

One way to approach this question (might make it more meaningful/tangible) is to ask the parent what advice they would give other parents when looking for a ‘good quality’ childminder e.g. what qualities and type of care other parents should look for, what questions they should ask a prospective childminder and what would characterise a ‘poor quality childminder e.g. what parents should avoid.

- satisfaction with childminding service/childcare provided
  - what like the most/least about using a childminder; examples

**RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDMINDER & INFORMATION SHARING**

**Relationship**
- parents overall view on how they work with their current childminder
- how do they manage/negotiate the relationship with their childminder (any tensions; if so how managed/resolved)

**Information**
- how do you find out what your child/children have been doing at their childminders
- how important to you is knowing what your child has been doing and learning
- how much information do you want from a childminder (what kinds of information, e.g. activities child has been doing, what they are learning, stage of development etc.)

**KNOWLEDGE AND VIEWS OF EYFS**

*Note – this section may be short if parent has little knowledge of the EYFS.*

- knowledge and views of EYFS
  - have you heard of the Early Years Foundation Stage (also known as EYFS)

*If unsure/or say no, read the following explanation, then check if this is something the parent has any knowledge of...*

The Early Years Foundation Stage (often shorted to EYFS) is a stage of children’s development from birth to the end of their first (Reception) year in school. The EYFS Framework describes how early years practitioners (including childminders) should work with children and their families to support their development and learning. It describes how your child should be kept safe and cared for.

- how did they hear about the EYFS (e.g. childminder, other parents, staff in other early years setting etc.)
- what do they know about the EYFS
- what do they think of the EYFS
how important is childminders working to a framework such as the EYFS to you (does it influence your choice of using a childminder in any way)

For all (regardless of level of knowledge of EYFS)

what further advice or information on the EYFS would they like to see (who provided by, in what ways, what difference if any this would make)

CLOSING SECTION

overall satisfaction with the use of childminders services

In general, how happy with using the services of a childminder

would they recommend childminding as a form of childcare to other parents (if yes, reasons why; if no, why not)

plans to continue using the services of childminders

anything else you think we should know
Appendix E

Differences between childminders based on clusters

In this section we present key differences between childminders in our national sample based on the four cluster groupings. In particular, we selected the following variables to examine by cluster:

- Age groups of children cared for
- Working hours
- Views on childcare quality and childrearing
- Activities and free play
- Reasons for becoming a childminder and reasons to stop practicing
- Job satisfaction
- Relationship with parents
- Sources of support
- Perceptions of the EYFS.

Age groups of children

Childminders were no more or less likely to care for certain age groups of children depending on their cluster membership with one exception: childminders in C3 were less likely to care for toddlers than childminders in the other three groups, and childminders in C4 were most likely to care for toddlers (see Figure D.1)

Figure D.1 Childminder cares for toddlers by cluster

\[ n=489; \chi^2(3)=10.8, \ p=.04 \]
The number of different age groups childminders cared for and the number of children they were registered to care for did not significantly differ by cluster membership.

**Working hours**

Childminders’ working hours did not vary depending on cluster membership. Childminders in clusters C1-C2 were, however, much more likely to offer care after 7pm than childminders in C3-C4 (see Figure D.2).

**Figure D.2 Childminder offers care after 7pm by cluster**

![Bar chart showing percentage of childminders offering care after 7pm by cluster]

\[ n=489; \chi^2(3)=16.0, p=.01 \]

No significant cluster differences emerged in the percentage of childminders offering early care (i.e. before 8am), overnight care or weekend care, or the number of weeks of annual leave childminders took annually.

**Views on childcare quality and childrearing**

Childminders’ views of the most important aspects of provision for overall quality differed according to cluster membership for two features: the importance of qualifications and training and the teaching of cultural or religious values. The means for each cluster are displayed in Figure D.3 below.
Childminders in clusters C1-C2 attributed more importance to both of the features above than childminders in C3-C4. There were also trends for childminders in C1 to perceive that preparing children for school was a more important aspect of their role than childminders in C4 and for childminders in C1 to attribute more importance to helping children to develop and learn than childminders in C3.

**Activities and free play**

The number of weekly structured activities and time spent in free play daily did not significantly differ according to cluster membership. Some significant differences did emerge, however in terms of the frequency specific types of activities were on offer. The findings are presented in Figure D.4 below.
There was no particular pattern to the significant differences in activities between clusters. Childminders in C1 and C3 offered sand and water play more frequently during the warmer months than childminders in C4. In terms of writing, childminders in C1-C2 provided more frequent writing activities than childminders in C3-C4. Childminders in C4 had a lower frequency of provision of both music-related and home-based activities than childminders in the other three clusters. Finally, childminders in C2 allowed more television viewing than childminders in C1 and C3.

**Reasons for becoming a childminder and reasons to stop practicing**

In terms of the key reasons childminders chose their profession, only one significant difference by cluster grouping emerged: childminders who opted into the profession as a way of staying home with their own children were most likely to be in C1 and least likely to be in C2 (see Figure D.5). Indeed, more than three-quarters of childminders in C1, C3 and C4 identified staying home with their own children as a key reason for becoming a childminder.
Figure D.5 Became a childminder as a means of staying home with own children by cluster

![Bar chart showing the percentage of childminders in C1 to C4 who became childminders as a means of staying home with their own children.](chart1)

\[n=489; \chi^2(3)=14.3, \ p=.01\]

There was some variability by cluster membership regarding the main reason childminders would stop practicing. These differences are presented in Figure D.6.

Figure D.6 Main reason childminders would stop practicing by cluster

![Bar chart showing the main reasons childminders would stop practicing in C1 to C4.](chart2)

\[^a n=472; \chi^2(3)=30.4, \ p=.00; \ ^b n=472; \chi^2(3)=14.7, \ p=.00\]

About half of the childminders in C4 indicated that they would stop practicing due to retirement. Only 16-21 per cent of childminders in the other clusters reported retirement as the main reason they would stop practicing. Almost no childminders in C4, however, reported that they would stop practicing to take another childcare-related job. Although not a large proportion, nearly one-fifth
of childminders in C3 indicated that they may leave childminding for another childcare-related job.

**Job satisfaction**

Regardless of cluster membership, childminders were broadly satisfied with their jobs. In terms of their satisfaction with the recognition they get for their work, childminders in C2 and C4 expressed greater satisfaction than childminders in C1 and C3. Figure D.7 presents the average satisfaction scores.

**Figure D.7 Average satisfaction with recognition childminders get for their work by cluster**

![Average satisfaction with recognition](image)

\( n=488; \) \( F(3, 199)=6.6, p=00 \)

**Relationship with parents**

We examined differences between childminders in terms of the degree of their involvement of parents in children’s learning and no statistically significant differences emerged. There was a trend, however, that childminders in C2 were more likely than childminders in C4 to give parents informal support for their children’s learning at home.

As seen in Figure D.8, a few significant differences in identified tensions with parents emerged.
The general trend displayed in Figure D.8 above is that childminders in C4 were less likely to report tensions with parents than childminders in the remaining three cluster groups. Childminders in C1 were particularly likely to report difficulties with parents not making payments on time and bringing sick children into their homes, while childminders in C2 were most likely to report tensions around negotiating fees and terms of payment.

**Sources of support**

As previously summarised, NCMA or local authority coordinated network membership was one of the input variables for cluster membership with all of the childminders in C1 belonging to a network, 60 per cent of C2 childminders, about a quarter of C4 childminders and none of C3 childminders. Thus, we would expect some differences in terms of who childminders seek out for advice or help.
As seen in Figure D.9 above, childminders in C3 were less likely to use local authority advisors or network coordinators than the childminders in the other clusters, particularly those in C1-C2, who were also the most likely to belong to networks. It is unclear why any childminders in C3 would seek the help of a network coordinator given that none of them reported being in a network. It may be that they use informal networks, which were not included in the overall item on network membership. Both of these sources of support are more formal, with utilisation of less formal types of supports such as other childminders, the NCMA or local Children’s Centres comparable across clusters.

Perceptions of the EYFS

Childminders’ knowledge of the EYFS was one of the cluster input variables, where we saw some small, but statistically significant, differences between childminders with childminders in C1-C2 reporting more awareness of the EYFS than the long-time childminders in C4. In this final section, we examine any differences in childminders’ initial perceptions of the EYFS according to cluster grouping.
Figure D.10 Aspects of the EYFS that childminders liked the most by cluster

![Graph showing aspects of the EYFS liked by childminders by cluster]

\(n=474; \quad ^a \chi^2(3)=17.1, p=.00; \quad ^b \chi^2(3)=13.8, p=.03\)

By and large, few significant differences by cluster grouping emerged. As seen in Figure D.10, however, childminders in C1 felt more favourably about two aspects of the EYFS than their counterparts: that it provides a common framework for childminders and its child-centred focus. Childminders’ perceptions of the key challenges of the EYFS did not vary by cluster membership. It is important to remember, however, that these items were only asked of childminders with a moderate level of knowledge of the EYFS.