

Our Commitment to Childminding in Scotland

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Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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INTRODUCTION

At the outset of 2020 the Scottish Government, Local Government and our partners throughout the childcare sector, were focused with excitement on the anticipated expansion of early learning and childcare and the development of a new school age childcare strategic framework. Sadly, we could not have predicted the overwhelming impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The resulting closure of most childcare settings had a profound impact on children, families and those working in settings. The full scale of that impact is not yet known and as we move through recovery and experience new restrictions we will continue to monitor impacts and consider our plans in that context.

A Vibrant Childminding Sector in Scotland

Childminders as an important element of the childcare sector offer a unique experience of childcare for children and families. They offer care and learning for children in their own home, in generally small groups with no more than six children. Childminders look after children of all ages; for example in a single setting a childminder could be caring for an infant, young children under 5 years of age, alongside older children of school age.

A childminder can offer children and their families a range of benefits. For instance a small home-based setting can be particularly helpful for some children with additional support needs or a child who may find a larger setting challenging. The opportunity to learn through play with children of different ages can also build confidence and support development.¹ Childminders also develop close relationships with the families they care for, offering important wider support to families within their community.

Childminders have one of the highest ratings across all quality criteria in inspections by the Care Inspectorate.²

We know that quality childcare is important for the whole family, giving children opportunities to learn through play in a nurturing environment and supporting parents to access work, training or study.

Often a childminder can provide welcome and necessary flexibility for parents who need to manage work commitments. Childminders may sometimes be used to provide wrap around care alongside nurseries or schools. This blended care approach can provide parents with more options as their children grow and develop, and may also support parents looking for care for siblings of different ages. Childminders provide continuity of care throughout childhood, from care and learning during 0-5 years to later providing before and after school care, as well as care during school holidays.

¹ A Review of the Research on Childminding: Understanding Children's Experiences in Home-Based Childcare Settings, Ang et al, Early Childhood Educ J (2017).

² [Care Inspectorate](#), September 2019

Childminders play an important role in Scotland's school age childcare sector, with almost 50% of children receiving care from childminders being of school age³. Many families rely on childminders from their children's earliest weeks and months of life through to their time at school.

The most recent published Care Inspectorate data shows that 32,700 children were registered to receive childcare from childminders in 2018, representing 13% of childcare provision in Scotland. ⁴

Childminding not only provides these benefits to children and families, but offers a rewarding career for childminders themselves. They see children grow and flourish as they learn, and offer support to families when they need it.

The sector does however face challenges, some of which existed before COVID-19 and will continue beyond it. It is vital to recognise that childminders are self-employed lone workers in most cases, who are not just providing care. They are running a business, fulfilling obligations in respect of training, administration, and are responsible for marketing and finding families to support through the service they provide.

There can be a gap in understanding the option of childminding and the benefits it offers. We recognise that more can be done to ensure childminders are viewed by parents, other providers and local authorities as central to a flexible and family focused childcare offer in the community as well as being essential to the early learning and childcare expansion.

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³ Care Inspectorate Early learning and childcare statistics 2018, September 2019, supporting tables, Table 1a:

<https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/publications-statistics/19-public/statistics>

⁴ Care Inspectorate Early learning and childcare statistics 2018, September 2019:

https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/Early_learning_and_childcare_statistics_2018.pdf

Impact of COVID-19

Throughout the initial closure period many childminding settings did remain open to provide critical childcare to children of key workers, and vulnerable children. Among them over one thousand childminders continued to care for their existing, or new, children. As the strictest phases of lockdown eased the childcare sector as a whole steadily reopened, first among those to be allowed to reopen were childminders from the 3 June.

Reopening has not been a straightforward process, there has not been a swift return to a pre COVID- 19 normality. The COVID-19 virus is still prevalent in the world and in our communities. Therefore [safe reopening guidance](#) was developed in consultation with representatives of the sector and based on scientific and expert advice. Recognising the unique nature of the service that they provide, specific reopening guidance was developed for [childminding settings](#).

The Scottish Government worked closely with sector representative bodies, including the Scottish Childminding Association, Early Years Scotland, Care and Learning Alliance, and the Scottish Out of School Care Network, throughout the pandemic period and recovery. This constructive dialogue helped to inform policy decisions on the basis of understanding the impact of the virus and restrictions on childcare for parents and for childcare businesses, balanced against the scientific and expert evidence available.

Initial guidance in the first 10 weeks of the reopening period from 3 June 2020 retained key restrictions to minimise contact between multiple households. This included, limiting the numbers of households for whom childminders could provide care for and restricting the attendance of children at multiple settings unless essential to support key workers. Further to ongoing suppression of the virus and scientific advice, those restrictions were largely eased in the second and third iterations of the guidance which came into effect from 10 July.

While the prevailing guidance at the time of writing does not reflect a return to normal, the easing of restrictions in particular for childminders operating smaller settings resulted in childminders being able to run a close to business as usual model in terms of household numbers and operating conditions. However, we recognise that in common with other providers there has been some evidence of a fall in parental demand during the pandemic period, which will have resulted in a drop in income. Such an impact is particularly felt by smaller settings, like childminders.

Evidence, based on surveys run by both the Scottish Government⁵ and the Scottish Childminding Association in June 2020, indicates that whilst childminders, as with other childcare providers, face constraints on their income the specific reopening guidance for childminders did not result in the additional cost pressures that other childcare settings faced from their reopening guidance. Notwithstanding that these surveys were undertaken in the early stages of implementing new guidance, the

⁵ [Survey of childcare providers on the impact of reopening guidance: summary](#), Scottish Government

guidance at the time was more restrictive in the first phase of reopening under Scotland's Routemap. In contrast to other services (with the exception of fully outdoor providers), childminders had also been able to reopen from 3 June with all day care of children services not able to reopen until 15 July. Childminders have also been able to remain open and operating during the period of restrictions which started on 26 December 2020. During this time, childminders caring for fewer than 12 children have been able to operate based on normal attendance, while childminders currently caring for 12 or more children have been asked to restrict attendance to children of key workers and vulnerable children in line with guidance to other larger childcare settings. It is recognised, that in common with businesses across the economy, the need to respond to the ongoing pandemic may be resulting in some additional costs for cleaning, sanitisers and PPE.

The period of response to the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery had an impact on plans for the expansion to 1140 hours, which has been unfortunately delayed. The Scottish Government will be working closely with local authorities to roll out 1140 hours wherever this is deliverable, and to set a new timeline to reinstate the statutory duty for 1140 hours as soon as possible.

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Financial Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic and resulting closures will also have had an impact on many childcare providers in the sector. Many childminders, like other providers, have experienced losses in income normally received through fees paid for childcare.

Childminders may have been able to access support through a number of different routes. For example, childminders whose income was negatively impacted by COVID-19, and who met the [eligibility criteria](#), may have been able to access support through the [Self-employment Income Support Scheme](#), which has recently been extended to April 2021. In addition to which the Scottish Government made available a Newly Self Employed Support Scheme for those self-employed who had not been in operation long enough to be eligible for the UK Government scheme.

Those childminders delivering funded ELC will have benefited from the continuation of these payments for the duration of the closure period. And a number of childminders remained open to provide critical childcare which was funded by local authorities. The Scottish Government has provided information to childminders on the range of support available to them on www.gov.scot.

Childminders caring for 12 or more children who have been affected by the restrictions on their operations brought into effect from 26 December 2020 will be able to access the temporary financial support which is being provided, to enable these larger settings to continue to open for families. Further information on this support will be made available on the [Scottish Government's website](#).

However, it is recognised that some childminders may not have been able to access financial support through these routes. To assist those childminders who struggled to access financial support, or where support was less than anticipated, throughout this difficult period the Scottish Government has provided funding totalling £420,000 to the [Scottish Childminding Association \(SCMA\)](#) for a Childminding Workforce Support Fund.

As recovery progresses we know there will continue to be challenges for all across the sector in recovering from the financial impact, in supporting children and families in their return to settings against a backdrop of continued uncertainty, and in rebuilding the confidence of providers themselves in their role and future. That is why on 22 January 2021 the Scottish Government announced that a further £1 million of support will be available to provide grants to childminders to support their business sustainability. Further details on this financial support will be made available on the [Scottish Government's website](#). We will continue to monitor closely, working in collaboration with the SCMA and others, the longer term impacts to childminding sustainability as we progress through the stages of pandemic recovery.

Re-establishing our plans and building on them

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Childminders have an important role to play within the wider childcare offering. They provide a smaller scale care, nurturing learning environment for children in the earliest years and beyond. This unique home-based approach to childcare enabled the decision to allow earlier reopening of the childminding sector during the phases of recovery.

As the recovery has progressed, the time is right to consider those plans which had to be put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic and identify how best to re-establish these as part of our commitment to a vibrant childminding sector.

Our plans for the coming months must reflect the period we have been through and the new challenges it continues to pose, as well as looking to the future we want to create for childminders and the families they support in Scotland. High quality childcare provision for children of all ages supports their learning, development and wellbeing as well as enabling parents and carers to participate in work, education and training. We continue to look forward to delivery of 1140 hours of funded ELC across Scotland but we know, and this has been emphasised by the recent crisis, the crucial importance of childcare for all ages.

We are also committed to publishing a Strategic Framework for School age Childcare by the end of this Parliament. Childminders play an important part in the school age childcare landscape and we will work closely with childminders themselves and representative bodies in the development of that framework. This document includes the delivery of that Framework as part of our activity for supporting childminders. Following the publication of that framework it would be our intention to refresh this document to ensure that we are maximising our actions in support of childminding in a way which complements and adds value to our wider school age childcare ambitions.

Case Study – Covid-19 Impact

In this case study we focus on the area of Stirling, where the Council and SCMA worked together to identify families who required childcare at very short notice but where the local larger hub setting was unsuitable. Within three days of lockdown being announced, families were being placed with local childminders and here we follow the journey of one such family.

Background

The family have two daughters, aged two and three. Both parents are in the medical profession, with mum being a doctor at the local hospital and dad a clinical trainer within a mental health organisation. Due to the nature of their work, attending set times at a Hub was not an option as it didn't provide the flexibility they needed and they did not have any family support locally. They hadn't used a childminder before, and both were little hesitant in leaving their daughters with a stranger.

As timescales were short with both parents needing to work, there wasn't time for the childminder, Claire, to meet the family properly and have settling in periods. Claire contacted them and had a long discussion on the phone to talk about herself and her home and to get to know the children.

From the first day, the children settled really quickly with Claire. Due to the nature of the parents work Claire had to be flexible over pick up times and days worked and sometime had to have the girls at short notice.

Peace of mind and continuity for the future

Both girls developed a strong relationship with Claire, so much so, that it was decided the youngest would remain with her. The parents have seen a real difference in both girls confidence and their development and are relieved the girls have had such a nurturing, stable and secure childcare setting during this period.

Testimony from the family:

“An excellent service giving us peace of mind. The girls love Claire and enjoy their time under her care.

We are grateful for Claire’s flexibility during these uncertain times and it means we have spent less time worrying about shift changes at the last minute. Both girls’ social skills and confidence have come on enormously since starting with Claire. The one-to-one care that has been provided means that the girls get the attention and input they need.

This service has allowed Paul to get back into a normal routine, whereas before he was working through most nights and looking after the kids while I was at work. There is no doubt that this service has been hugely beneficial to his mental health and wellbeing.

We would just like to say thank you to everyone who has made this possible, especially Claire who has been accommodating, professional and kind with her time. It is because of all this that we asked Claire if she can take on Charlotte after July”.

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Childminders and the ELC Expansion

[Funding Follows the Child](#) was due to be introduced in August 2020 alongside the statutory roll-out of 1140 hours of funded ELC entitlement. Funding Follows the Child is 'provider neutral' and is underpinned by a National Standard that all settings wishing to offer funded ELC – regardless of whether they are in the public, private or third sector, including childminders – will have to meet. This places choice in parents' and carers' hands as to where their child can access their ELC entitlement.

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[Interim Guidance](#) published in July 2020 highlighted that, in light of the impacts of COVID-19, it was no longer feasible to set a national requirement for all funded ELC providers to meet the National Standard from August 2020. However, it is expected that local authorities will continue to use the principles and criteria of Funding Follows the Child and the National Standard as a framework to shape local funded ELC delivery.

Funding Follows the Child provides an opportunity for more childminders to offer the funded ELC entitlement, and as we progress towards full national implementation we will continue to identify how to support childminders to meet the National Standard and to raise awareness of childminding as an option for funded ELC.

Framing and Progressing our Commitment to a Vibrant Childminding Sector

What follows is a set of activities, actions and future plans against 4 key themes, including some recent activities which have already been delivered.

These will be taken forward by the Scottish Government working in partnership with the sector and with local authorities. The focus initially is on those actions which are most pressing and can be delivered within the constraints of current public health measures. As those ease further our plans may adjust to make the most of new formats being possible; and where additional ideas can be taken forward, they will be.

Beyond the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in May 2021 this plan will be refreshed and brought up to date in line with feedback and reflection on delivered activities and actions.

Activities, Actions and Future Plans

We recognise that the restrictions imposed on operating during the initial lockdown and first stage of recovery (maximum household numbers and restriction on blended care) had a detrimental impact on childminding businesses. As the recovery has progressed these rules have been eased, however we are still living through a global pandemic and all of our activity remains subject to progress in suppressing and eradicating the virus.

We continue to keep the guidance for all providers under review, and we will continue to work closely with sector representative bodies (SCMA, CALA and EYS) to adjust and clarify guidance where we need to. Including consultation on substantive changes which may be required in different phases. We recognise that any move back to earlier guidance should it be necessary would be challenging. Given the importance of flexible childcare, which blended models can provide to parents and families, we will wherever possible maintain the ability for parents to make that choice where they need to.

In common with the Scottish Government's approach to tackling the COVID-19 pandemic as a whole, decisions on measures necessary will continue to be based on scientific and public health advice and consideration of the four harms. The direct health harms and importance of protecting the capacity of the NHS, will continue to inform our decision making alongside the risk of economic harm and social harm which may result from measures taken or the virus itself.

The activities and actions outlined below are a starting point in setting out our commitment to the childminding sector. They are focused on **four themes** which reflect the challenges experienced by childminders:

- *Investing in the development and growth of the childminding workforce*
- *Supporting childminding as a choice – availability and access to childminders*
- *Promoting childminding as a choice – helping parents and carers to make informed choices*
- *Business sustainability and support for childminders*

This document will continue to evolve and incorporate new activities such as those which are identified through some of the research we intend to undertake in the coming months.

The activities specifically cited in this first iteration of this document are set against a broad timeframe – **short, medium and long term**.

In the short term delivery of our planned activities will depend on progress in suppressing the virus and managing our ongoing response to the pandemic. However we are committed to continuing our work wherever we can to support a vibrant childminding sector as part of a thriving and diverse childcare offer in Scotland, therefore we have indicated where we will focus our efforts initially.

In view of that continuing uncertainty resulting from COVID-19, and the timeline to the next Scottish Parliamentary elections, we will take forward, complete or begin as many of these actions as are feasible and can be carried out in an impactful manner between now and the end of this Parliamentary session – in the next six months, or the **short term**.

Remaining actions will continue beyond that time period into the **medium term** – the following eight to twelve months. This plan will also be refreshed at these key stages.

Although some activities are cited as **longer term** objectives many of these flow from action which will start now. These are intended to provide an indication of the direction of travel over the coming 2-3 years, subject to feedback from the sector, emerging evidence, and decisions by Ministers about the Scottish Government's priorities and ambitions.

A refresh of the document following the next Scottish Parliamentary Election will enable a next iteration of this document to establish a forward plan over the lifespan of the next parliament.

Investing in the development and growth of the childminding

Childminders are a valued part of the childcare and early learning and childcare workforce. The Scottish Government is committed to supporting career-long learning which recognises and is tailored towards the unique learning environment childminders provide.

Families value the nurturing, home-based environment childminding offers and we want more families to be able to use their child's ELC entitlement in this way. We are therefore committed to promoting to existing childminders the benefits of becoming funded providers, and to supporting them to access and obtain the benchmark qualifications and annual hours of continuous professional learning they will need in order to meet the requirements of the National Standard for funded provision.⁶ [Interim guidance](#) on the requirements from August 2020 for Funding Follows the Child and the National Standard was published in July 2020.

The 2019 Scottish Childminding Association ELC Audit highlighted that the numbers (and share) of childminders either approved to deliver, or delivering, funded ELC increased between July 2018 and July 2019. The increases were particularly marked for 3 and 4 year olds with the proportion of childminders approved to deliver funded ELC for 3 and 4 year olds increasing from 2.3% to 12.6% between July 2018 and July 2019, while the proportion of childminders actually delivering funded ELC increased from 1.1% to 4.2% over this period⁷. In further thematic sections below on supporting parental choice, we set out commitments to ensuring that parents understand the options available to them and benefits of different types of setting. Supporting informed parental choice is a crucial part of closing the gap between childminders approved to deliver funded ELC and those actually delivering it.

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/funding-follows-child-national-standard-early-learning-childcare-providers-principles-practice/pages/4/>

⁷ https://www.childminding.org/Media/Docs/Common/SCMA%20ELC%20Audit%20Report%202019_FINAL_v2.pdf

We are committed to working with our partners including the SCMA to identify any barriers to childminders meeting the requirements of the National Standard. This includes the requirements related to induction, attainment of the benchmark qualifications (including, where appropriate, presenting evidence of prior learning), and completing at least 12 hours per year of continuous professional learning. Throughout this process we will identify what further support the Scottish Government and partners could provide to childminders for their professional learning.

In the context of the decline in total numbers of childminders operating in Scotland in the five years to 2019, as highlighted in the 2019 SCMA Audit, we are also committed to promoting a career in childminding to new entrants, to ensure that families can benefit from the unique learning environment offered by childminders, whether they are delivering the funded ELC hours, or all-ages childcare.

The Scottish Government recognises that the SCMA's strategy for strengthening childminding over the coming years includes important ambitions to seek to slow the decline in the workforce, and bring it back into gain. In our role in government we are committed to supporting the SCMA and other representative bodies with this by ensuring that our workforce campaigns and cooperation with partners, such as Skills Development Scotland and the Department of Work and Pensions, represents childminding careers distinctly and positively. We also propose below to undertake action to promote and support learning opportunities tailored to childminders to support their continued development and engagement.

The Scottish Government has led or funded a range of recent activities which have been focused on supporting childminders in their learning and development:

- We developed and have regularly refreshed [Your Childminding Journey](#), a learning and development resource launched by the Care Inspectorate in September 2017. This supports childminders in registering a service, induction, identifying valued skills, knowledge and understanding, and also in gathering evidence of prior learning to reflect on and improve practice.
- We worked with SVQ training providers to ensure childminders could access their training needs flexibly, at hours that suit them.
- We have developed a [suite of free online continuous professional development](#) modules for the entire ELC sector, which are available to childminders.
- In addition, using STEM strategy funding managed by Education Scotland, the SCMA have developed a suite of STEM courses and resources, which support the online modules and are aimed at childminding settings.
- Along with our partners Early Years Scotland, we have developed the [Team ELC Wellbeing Hub](#), providing practical advice and support on managing wellbeing for childminders and others who work in ELC. While this resource was developed with funding from the Scottish Government, it is complemented by other sources of support which are also available including through the Scottish Childminding Association.
- We supported childminders to undertake their induction through funding for [Individual Training Accounts](#) (ITAs) to cover the costs of the SCMA induction support programme, which we supported the development of. In the autumn 2020 round of ITAs childcare was identified as a priority area for funding, in the future we will continue to monitor need and ensure that where there is a risk of over subscription we act to ensure access to opportunities.
- The [Virtual Nature School](#) provided a free training resource for all early learning and childcare practitioners – including childminders - wishing to increase and improve outdoor experiences for their children during the COVID crisis. A childminder case study from this programme has been developed.
- The Care Inspectorate are developing bite size sessions as part of the improvement programme to support the sector achieve the National Standard and improve practice in the setting. These are also available to childminders and the first of these are launched to support self-evaluation in the sector. Further sessions will be developed in the near future supporting the sector raise their knowledge and skills in specific areas. Sessions can be accessed through the Care Inspectorate HUB, www.hub.careinspectorate.com.
- Education Scotland has provided a range of online professional learning opportunities and resources throughout the pandemic. These have been available for childminders to participate in, or in many cases to engage with at a time of their choosing.

Across the coming months and years we are committed to continuing to support childminders to invest in their professional development for the benefit of the children they care for of all ages, to access opportunities to provide funded ELC, as well as to engage in discussion about the importance and role of childminders in childcare.

Building a vibrant, supported childminding sector in which we retain and engage the current workforce, will in the medium and longer term, provide the basis for promoting the opportunities of becoming a childminder for childcare professionals at all stages of their career.

Our Short and Medium Term Commitments

In the context of our commitment to developing and engaging current childminders:

1. Develop and host an 'In Conversation with' (virtual) event with the Minister for Children and Young People for childminders to discuss the important role childminders play for families, and how government can best help develop the sector.
2. We are developing the [Team ELC Wellbeing Hub](#) further, to allow childminders to connect with their colleagues across Scotland and share their experiences. In doing so we will work with the SCMA and other representative bodies to ensure that we add value to and complement existing support and networking opportunities they provide their members. We are also developing a further series of online wellbeing support events, which will run until the end of 2020. These events will run at varying times of day and on different days of the week to ensure as many childminders as possible are able to access the sessions.
3. Work with SCMA and other partners to scope barriers to childminders accessing training and practice support opportunities and resources, including the issue of evidencing Prior Learning, to inform further work in this area. Consider in particular development of more 'bite-sized' resources and flexible learning models to support access to Continuous Professional Learning.
4. Work with employability bodies including Department of Work and Pensions and Skills Development Scotland to promote childminding as a career choice.
5. Work with SCMA to enhance the presence of information on childminding on the childcarecareersscotland.scot website.
6. Develop new online support sessions, together with Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. These sessions will include the involvement of childminders themselves in sharing their experiences alongside contributions from recognised experts from the field of childcare, early learning and child development. They will initially cover the themes below

and develop through drawing on further ideas and suggestions directly from childminders;

- a) the practical implications of the safe operating guidance, including protocols for if an outbreak occurs in the setting;
- b) Realising the Ambition – Being Me in childminding practice;
- c) Quality during recovery and beyond – including ensuring quality environments through the interactions, experiences and spaces offered in a home-based setting;
- d) Learning within the wider community to provide ideas and support in creatively using local community space and resources as part of learning through play; and,
- e) Self-Evaluation, supporting understanding of the approach used and the application of professional judgement.

7. Publish an additional chapter to “Out to Play” providing specific advice and guidance for childminders who want to increase and improve their outdoor play experiences for children. This will include case studies and practical examples.

In the context of better understanding trends in the childminding workforce to inform future actions:

8. Begin the independent research previously committed to into the trends within the childminding workforce, taking learning from the #TellSCMA: Childminding and You 2020 Survey to help frame this piece of work. This will be overseen by the Scottish Government, Care Inspectorate and SCMA

In the context of better enabling childminders to participate in the opportunity to provide the funded ELC entitlement:

9. Establish a short-life working group(s) with key partners, including sector representatives, local authorities, Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate, to explore flexibilities and good practice which would better support childminders to offer the ELC entitlement:
 - a) in the context of the interim guidance on the National Standard, whether flexibilities are required in the short-term in order to support and assist childminders to meet the benchmark qualifications.
 - b) In the context of blended placements between a childminder and another setting, whether there is a need for a toolkit or practice guidance which supports the settings in communicating well together to ensure a joined-up plan to support the child’s progression and achievement, and provide family support.

Our commitments over the longer term will see us continue to take forward focussed work to promote childminding as a career, incorporating learning from the research into workforce trends to help identify future targeted activity. Including establishing a dedicated working group to consider the results and action which may be required to address the issues identified.

We will link in with the Economic Recovery work being progressed by Scottish Government and partners to highlight employment opportunities in key sectors, targeting those who have lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will also ensure that our national childcare careers website reflects content on a career in childminding encompassing both ELC and School Age Childcare opportunities.

Working with our partners, we want to ensure childminders are fully supported to access the career-long training and practice support they need to meet the qualification and other requirements of the National Standard where they are funded providers for the national ELC entitlement. We also want to work with partners to explore opportunities to ensure that ELC students studying at college, are exposed to the career options of childminding within student placements as part of their course.

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Supporting Childminding as a choice – availability and access to childminders

Childminders offer flexibility for parents, and a continuity of care option for children from birth through school years. We want families to be able to access the flexible, supportive and high quality childcare that childminders can provide for that wide range of ages, including as part of the funded Early Learning and Childcare entitlement for all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds.

Under Funding Follows the Child parents and carers can access funded ELC in any setting, *including childminders*, that meets the National Standard, has a place available, and is willing to enter into a contract with their local authority. Whilst all settings wishing to offer funded ELC will have to meet the National Standard, where relevant, there are variations in some criteria for childminders to recognise the unique aspects of the service that they provide.

We know that not all childminders will wish to offer funded ELC. However, where they do it is important to ensure that they do not face barriers.

Our previous engagement and consultations with the sector to inform the development of Funding Follows the Child highlighted some specific challenges that childminders previously experienced in trying to offer funded ELC. This included challenges regarding the contracting process and, in particular, the volume of documentation that had to be completed. As part of Funding Follows the Child the Scottish Government and local authorities are committed to simplifying the process for, and reducing the burden on, providers to deliver the funded entitlement.

This also requires continued strengthening of partnership working across the country between local authorities and childminders. This will help to ensure that local authorities are able to appropriately reflect childminding services in their local ELC offers for families. There are already good examples of strong partnership working, which has supported more childminders to deliver funded ELC in these areas.

We understand that childminders can play a particularly important role in rural communities, and recognise the importance of working with partners to reflect the impact of rural geographies on the demand for and availability of flexible childcare.

When children reach school age, childminders play a vital role in offering many families the flexible, high quality childcare they need. We understand the importance of school age childcare for many families, enabling parents and carers to access work, addressing social and economic exclusion, and providing high quality experiences and improved outcomes for children.

The Scottish Government have committed to developing a new strategic framework for school age childcare in this parliamentary term. We have already engaged with childminders as part of our draft framework and consultation work in 2019 and will seek to develop policy which ensures that childminding is part of an accessible, affordable and flexible school age childcare system across Scotland.

To support childminders in developing their service we recently created a “support available to childminders” guide to direct childminders to key resources.

Our Short and Medium Term Commitments

In the context of our wider commitment to developing a strategic approach to School age Childcare:

10. Publish a School age Childcare Strategic Framework which will recognise the importance of childminders to the provision of School age Childcare in Scotland. This will include prioritising engagement with childminders as part of the continued development of our school age childcare policy.
 - We will consult with the SCMA, other representative bodies, childminders and families in the development of this framework and resulting actions, ensuring that the role of childminding in the community across families from birth to secondary school is reflected.
 - We will use the Strategic Framework to refresh *Our Commitment to a Vibrant Childminding Sector in Scotland* in a way which ensures we add value for childminders and continue to recognise the role they play for families.

In the context of ensuring access to childminders as a valuable service in support of low income and vulnerable families:

11. We will explore use of the Access to Childcare Fund in actions which consider how childminders can support low income families to access innovative models of flexible and affordable school age childcare. This will build on learning from the Community Childminding Services model and will set objectives around access for children with Additional Support Needs, tackling child poverty, and support of parents into employment.
12. The Scottish Government and SCMA will explore the potential for the further development of the [SCMA Wellbeing Service](#) after it has been evaluated, and the further development of the Community Childminding Services model as part of supporting holistic flexible childcare for children of all ages.

In the context of supporting more families to benefit from use of childminders within their child’s funded ELC entitlement:

13. Publish *Funding Follows the Child and National Standard: a guide for childminders*. This guide will support childminders to understand what they will need to do to be able to offer funded ELC under Funding Follows the Child. It includes key information on what the new National Standard means for childminders, directing them to resources and support. As part of this work we will consider with the SCMA and other partners where the support they're already providing to childminders could be expanded.
14. In the build up to the full national roll-out of all aspects of Funding Follows the Child we will work with local authorities to host a series of webinars aimed at supporting childminders to meet aspects of the National Standard and to enable them to offer funded ELC. We will include key partners including the SCMA in developing and running these sessions.
15. As part of the reestablishment of a delivery timeframe and plan for the 1140 expansion, we will :
 - a) actively share and promote case studies of how local authorities are effectively including childminders in their expansion plans. We will work with SCMA to identify recent examples of effective partnership working which we will share and promote across Scotland as part of identifying new capacity to bring forward the expansion.
 - b) continue to work with local authorities on understanding the benefits of supporting childminders to offer funded ELC, removing any barriers to childminders applying to offer funded ELC, and ensuring that decisions are informed by meaningful and effective consultation with parents and carers.
16. We are developing a new approach to operating the ELC Partnership Forum within current circumstances, and will ensure that the childminding representative bodies (SCMA, CALA and EYS) continue to play a part in the work of the Forum. As part of the Forum's upcoming work programme we will look to include a session focused on the challenges childminders face in being able to offer funded ELC, and on revisiting the wider work on the potential impacts of local authority policy and investment decisions on the competitiveness and business sustainability of providers.

Our commitments over the longer term will include building on our learning from actions in the short and medium term, and undertaking a parental study to explore how demand for all forms of childcare, including childminding, has changed as a result of COVID-19. This study will provide an evidentiary basis for designing future activities and interventions to support the availability of and access to childminders as part of Scotland's childcare offer.

Promoting childminding as a choice – helping parents and carers to make informed choices

We want to see collaborative efforts across all partners to support parental choice by highlighting the benefits of childminding settings, ensuring that parents and carers have the information they need to make an informed decision about the right setting for their child from birth (where appropriate) to school age.

It's important that parents and carers understand:

- The professionalism and offer of childminders, alongside other childcare providers.
- How to find out about childminders in their local area.
- Their right to use childminders and other registered providers for their child's funded entitlement to ELC.
- The possibility and benefits of using blended placements, including for the funded entitlement.

There have been encouraging trends in recent years of increases in the numbers of childminders both offering, and delivering, funded ELC to families. However, these increases have been from a low base and it will be important to build on these trends and support more childminders to be able to offer funded ELC.

Through Funding Follows the Child we want to support more families to use childminders, where they are able to meet the underpinning National Standard, to access their child's funded ELC entitlement.

In addition to supporting childminders to meet the National Standard, this requires clear, concise and timely communication with parents and carers to ensure that they have clarity as to what providers they can access their child's ELC entitlement.

In an earlier stage ahead of the anticipated expansion of the ELC entitlement in August 2020, we launched a national marketing campaign to raise parents' awareness of the ELC expansion in which childminding featured prominently. Alongside which we expanded the information available on parentclub.scot/elc about childminding as an option for funded ELC, including as part of a 'blended model'.

Our Short and Medium Term Commitments

In the context of providing robust evidence of the benefits of childminding, to support longer term parental communications:

17. Restart the planned IPSOS MORI research into the benefits for children and families of childminding, which the Scottish Government is funding. This will be overseen by the Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland and SCMA. The evidence base we will gain from this will be invaluable, and will help us to promote childminding in the long term.

In the context of providing parents with information about the ELC expansion and choices available to them:

18. Promote childminders as a positive option for ELC with parents and carers, through a refresh of the information on Parent Club designed to let parents know about how childminders can support their child. Working with local authorities to compliment the national level information with tailored inclusive local information. Including:
 - a) information about flexibility and choice
 - b) helping parents to understand the professionalism of the childminding sector
 - c) illustrating quality, including how national guidance on learning in the early years is used in childminder settings.
19. Identify in collaboration with sector representative bodies (SCMA, CALA and EYS), local authorities and other partners, good practice examples from local authorities which work in partnership with childminders to explain and market the options available to parents. For example, the way that parents are informed about their options for their child's funded entitlement, including the way in which information about funded providers is shared. Share these examples with all local authorities and take learning for national level communications.
20. Include childminding examples and parental choice in any ELC marketing campaign. This will include hearing from parents who have used childminders, both for the full funded entitlement and as part of a blended placement. We will work with partners to identify a range of case studies, to help families to understand the benefits and the practicalities. For example:
 - a) A family that chose to use a childminder for all of their funded hours
 - b) A family that split their funded entitlement between a nursery and a childminder – including the benefits, and the practicalities of how they applied for it.
 - c) A family that had reservations about using a childminder, but was pleased with the impact on their child.
 - d) A family that used a childminder for their eligible 2 year old.
 - e) A family that uses a childminder both for younger children and for school age childcare, possibly where the younger child then obtained a funded place on turning 3 years old.
 - f) A childminder who works mainly outdoors.

In the longer term we want to work with our partners to design marketing and parental choice information informed by the results of the IPSOS MORI research and the wider range of evidence available through our partners.

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Business sustainability and support for childminders

The pandemic has had a negative impact on businesses across Scotland. It has resulted in childminders, as with many other childcare providers, having concerns regarding their financial sustainability. In order to support recovery, and provide choice and flexibility to families, it is vital to have a financially sustainable childcare sector.

The evidence, including surveys of providers undertaken in June 2020 by both the Scottish Government and the SCMA, indicates that childminders, as with other providers, have experienced significant pressures on their incomes. The declines in income for childminders reflect both general reductions in demand from families, as well as reduced opportunities for offering some models of delivery such as blended models.

However, in contrast to other providers the evidence indicates that the specific reopening guidance for childminders did not result in the additional cost pressures that other childcare settings were facing from their reopening guidance. For example, a [Scottish Government survey of providers over the period 19-24 June](#), found that whilst 79% of day care of children respondents to the survey reported that they expected their costs to increase as a result of the reopening guidance. In contrast 65% of childminders who responded indicated that they either expected no change in costs or for costs to decrease. The SCMA found “broadly comparable” results in a survey that they ran in late June 2020.

Childminders may have been able to access support to cover some of their lost income through schemes such as the Self Employed Income Support Scheme or the Newly Self-Employed Hardship Fund, the Scottish Government. In addition, for those childminders delivering funded ELC, they will have benefitted from local authorities continued payments for the statutory ELC entitlement for the duration of closures, regardless of whether providers were open or closed.

Childminders caring for 12 or more children who have been affected by the restrictions on their operations brought into effect from 26 December 2020 will be able to access the Temporary Financial Support which is being provided. Further information on this support will be made available on the [Scottish Government's website](#).

However, we are aware that not all childminders have been able to access support through these routes.

Recent activities the Scottish Government has led or funded which have been focused on supporting sustainability:

- The Scottish Government has provided funding to enable local authorities to pay sustainable rates to childcare providers, including childminders, delivering funded ELC from August 2020. The payment of sustainable rates to funded providers will be vital to supporting financial sustainability across the sector.

- To support sustainability the [Interim Guidance on Funding Follows the Child](#) encourages local authorities to work with funded providers to commission provision beyond the 600 hours statutory minimum where possible, and provided this is within current budgets.
- In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic a range of financial support was made available which many childminders will have been able to access. This includes the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (UK Government); the Newly Self Employed Hardship Fund (Scottish Government); and the deferral of tax payments, including self-assessment payments.
- Childminders who were in partnership with local authorities to deliver funded ELC continued to receive those ELC payments during the closure period, and around 1,000 childminders across the country worked, many in cooperation with local authorities, to provide critical childcare to key worker families and vulnerable children.
- The Scottish Government initially joint funded, with the SCMA, the £60,000 Childminding Workforce Support Scheme open to all childminders who have been unable to access support through other routes. In September 2020, we announced that an additional £390,000 would be provided to extend the Childminding Workforce Support Scheme, including up to £60,000 for administration with an agreement to re-purpose any unused administration fees back into the fund to increase the number of grants available.
- On 22 January 2021 the Scottish Government announced that a further £1 million of support will be available to provide grants to childminders to support their business sustainability. Further details on this financial support will be made available on the [Scottish Government's website](#).
- We have worked with the childminding sector to provide clarity on the optional charges that childminding settings are able to offer whilst still being able to offer funded ELC. This information, particularly around where retainer fees are permitted, was published in the [ELC Statutory Guidance consultation](#) in December 2019. The final version of the ELC Statutory Guidance will be published ahead of the statutory roll-out of 1140 hours.

Our Short and Medium Term Commitments

In the context of supporting childminders to access the opportunity to provide funded ELC:

21. Re-schedule the conference aimed at supporting more childminders to offer funded ELC, initially due to be hosted in April 2020, taking account of current restrictions to explore virtual opportunities and the potential for series of mini-events if more appropriate.
22. Commence a review of local tendering approaches, with involvement from key partners including local authorities and sector representative bodies (SCMA, CALA and EYS), to understand how recent changes, as part of Funding Follows the Child, have impacted on small and micro-enterprises such as childminders. This review will, where appropriate, identify where further support can be provided to these enterprises, good practice examples and any areas for further improvement.

In the context of supporting childminders to manage their business sustainably, a project considering the potential for business support tools and training for all childcare providers, and ensuring that this support is accessible, will explicitly examine the concerns and challenges of childminders as mainly self-employed lone workers.

The Scottish Government is committed to continuing to review the need for further support across the whole childcare sector in response to the impact of COVID-19. In particular, should further funding become available at a later date as a result of savings elsewhere, we will consider the best means of supporting childminders to develop and grow as a valued part of our sector.

We will also work with partners to consider whether there are specific challenges for the sustainability of childminders in rural communities which may require tailored support.

We will continue to monitor closely, working in collaboration with the SCMA and others, the longer term impacts to childminding sustainability as we progress through the stages of pandemic recovery, this will inform future activities.



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