

# A Survey of Former Childminders

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**Research Report  
No 300**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- ES.1 Further expansion of childcare provision is planned under the National Childcare Strategy. As the most commonly used form of non-parental childcare after friends and relatives, childminders have an important role to play in this expansion. A childcare place for an extra 1.6 million children is anticipated by 2004, with a minimum of 145,000 new places with childminders.
- ES.2 Yet, between 1996 and 2000 there has been a steady decline in the number of registered childminders in England. At a time when the Government wants to expand childcare provision, the consistent decline in the number of childminders is cause for concern. Thomas Coram Research Unit was therefore commissioned to conduct a survey of former childminders to examine the reasons why childminders stop childminding. Two hundred and five former childminders randomly selected from the closed lists of 11 local authorities were interviewed.
- ES.3 Former childminders were predominately female, white, aged between 35 and 44, living with a partner and with children of their own. Women often undertake childminding when their children are young so that they can remain at home with them. Childminding therefore tends to be seen as a convenient or stop-gap form of employment, though a third did view it as a long-term career. Six years was the average length of time spent working as a childminder.
- ES.4 The main reason for ceasing to childmind was the desire to do something else, such as another job, training or studying followed by family reasons, such as pregnancy or birth of another child. Very few mentioned tighter regulation or competition from other types of childcare as the reason why they had stopped. Alternative employment offered better working conditions, particularly pay, greater satisfaction and opportunities to interact with other adults. It was for these reasons that their alternative employment was seen as better than childminding.
- ES.5 Improved working conditions, particularly better pay, was most likely to be mentioned as the factor that would have encouraged some to continue with

childminding rather than leave. Although many thought a return to childminding unlikely, about a third may be persuaded to return if their family situation changed or if childminding paid more.

- ES.6 After leaving childminding, almost a third of former childminders had gone on to work in jobs related to childcare and a further third thought they might take such work in the future. Those with a childcare qualification were more likely to move on to childcare-related employment. This suggests that former childminders, particularly those with a childcare qualification, want to work with children and may therefore be recruited into alternative childcare-related work.
- ES.7 When their children are older and at school, childminders are likely to look for alternative employment and are unlikely to return to childminding unless their family or personal circumstances change. This situation is sustainable only while there are sufficient numbers of women willing to become childminders while their children are young and replace those that leave.
- ES.8 It is possible that the pool of women from which childminders have been traditionally drawn is shrinking. More women are in a position to pursue a career and pay for childcare. At the same time, there is increasing competition for female labour resulting in alternative employment opportunities with greater flexibility in terms of hours and offering better rewards than childminding.
- ES.9 Measures such as the childcare recruitment campaign, introduction of start-up grants and the development of childminder networks eligible for nursery education grant may increase the number of registered childminders. However, though nearly one in five thought it likely that they would return to childminding, the survey results suggest that unless there is an improvement in the working conditions of childminders, such policies are unlikely to improve retention among the childminding workforce.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

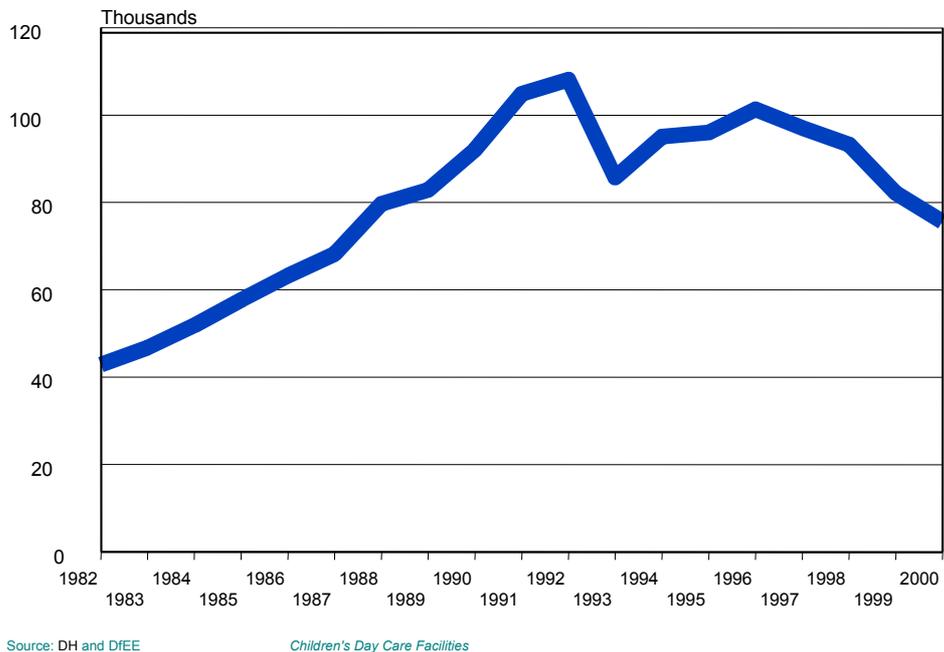
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- 1.1 The last four years have seen major policy developments in the field of childcare and early years provision. The responsibility for day care services under the Children Act has transferred from the Department of Health (DH) to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) formerly known as the Department for Education and Employment. From September 2001, responsibility for regulation of childcare provision will be transferred from local authorities (Social Services Departments) to a national agency, the Early Years Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). At the same time, a new set of national standards for OFSTED to apply is being prepared. Childminding will therefore be brought within a framework of regulation that is both national and part of the education system.
- 1.2 Part-time nursery education has been extended to all four-year olds and will be available to all three-year olds by 2004. Childminders have been given the opportunity to contribute to this provision, as part of an approved childminders' network. By 2004, the government plans to create new childcare places for 1.6 million children with a minimum of 145,000 new places with childminders including 25,000 places in areas of disadvantage (DfEE, 2001). To meet this expansion in childcare provision, it is estimated that at least 150,000 new people will need to be recruited. Several policy initiatives have been implemented in an attempt to increase recruitment including the Childcare Recruitment Campaign and start-up grants for new childminders. These developments have occurred within the context of the National Childcare Strategy whose overall aim is "to ensure good quality, affordable childcare for children aged 0 to 14 in every neighbourhood, including both formal childcare and support for informal arrangements" (DfEE, 1998: 6).
- 1.3 Childminders have an important role to play in the National Childcare Strategy. Secondary analysis of the Family Resources Survey (FRS), a national survey conducted each year for the Department of Social Security, shows that after relatives and friends, childminders are the most commonly used form of non-parental childcare

(Mooney et al., 2001). Of the children aged under five years, a quarter were receiving non-parental care. Of these, 58% were looked after by relatives, 22% by childminders, 19% by nurseries/playgroups and 5% by nannies/au-pairs. The FRS analysis also shows that the great majority of mothers and fathers using childminders and day nurseries worked full-time and that the majority (56% of mothers, 59% of fathers) were in professional and managerial jobs. These socio-economic differences were also observed in the government-funded survey of parents' demand for childcare (LaValle et al., 2000 (p.9)). Childminders were the most common type of formal childcare used by couples where both were working full-time and by lone parents working full-time, and their use increased with household income from 3% for the lowest income group to 17% for the highest.

- 1.4 Yet, between 1989 and 2000 the national figures for registered childminders in England have fluctuated (Figure 1) with a steady decline since 1996 from 102,600 to 75,600 in 2000 (DfEE, 2000). The sharp fall in numbers between 1992 and 1993 is thought to be due to the implementation in 1991 of the Children Act 1989, which introduced a new system of regulation. Childminder registers were updated at this time and childminders who were no longer childminding were removed from the register.

**Fig. 1: Registered childminders from 1982 to 2000**



1.5 While there has been a steady decline in numbers over the four years from 1996, during the same period there has been significant growth in other forms of childcare. In particular, there has been a large increase in provision of private day nurseries which are providing and competing for similar socio-economic groups of parents. Between 1989 and 2000, the number of private day nurseries more than quadrupled, from 1,700 to 7,100, while the number of registered places in these nurseries grew more than five-fold, from 45,000 to 245,100 (DH 1990, 2000). There has also been a large increase in centre-based school-aged childcare, from fewer than 200 centres in 1990 to almost 6,000 in 2000 (Kids Clubs Network, 2000). It is important to remember that around 40% of children who are cared for by childminders are of school age (Employers Organisation/Improvement and Development Agency, 1999).

1.6 At a time when the Government wants to expand childcare provision under the National Childcare Strategy, the consistent decline in the number of registered childminders is a cause for concern. Consequently, the DfES (formerly DfEE) commissioned the Thomas Coram Research Unit to conduct a survey of former childminders to examine the reasons why childminders stop childminding. This piece

of work complements the study, *Who Cares? Childminding in the 1990s*, which was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Mooney et al., 2001). That study focused specifically on childminding as an occupation and included a postal survey of more than a 1,000 childminders and 30 case studies, which included interviews with 10 former childminders. The study also touched on the reasons for the decline in childminder numbers in a number of ways: through analysis, at local authority level, of official government statistics on day care facilities, a survey of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships and interviews with key officers in ten local authorities and officers of the National Childminding Association. Where appropriate we have drawn comparisons with the JRF study.

## 2. RESULTS

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### 2.1 Introduction

Two hundred and five former childminders, randomly selected from the closed lists of 11 local authorities, were interviewed by telephone. Details of methodology can be found in Appendix A. Appendix B provides a copy of the interview schedule.

### 2.2 Demographics

2.2.1 Respondents were predominately female, white, living with a partner and with their own children (Table 2.1). More than half the sample were aged between 35 and 44.

**Table 2:1 Demographic characteristics of sample**

	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	203	99
Male	2	1
Total	205	100
<b>Age</b>		
18-24	3	1
25-34	36	18
35-44	119	58
45-54	36	18
55-64	8	4
65+	3	1
Total	205	100
<b>Ethnic Group</b>		
White	181	88
Asian	4	2
Black	12	6
Other	7	3
Refused	1	1
Total	205	100
<b>Household Status</b>		
Couple	173	84
On own	32	16
Total	205	100
<b>Own children</b>		
Yes	203	99
No	2	1
Total	205	100

2.2.2 Three-quarters had an educational qualification, most frequently a GCSE/GCE ‘O’ level or CSE (Table 2.2). More than a third (38%) said they had a childcare qualification, most frequently a S/NVQ in Childcare and Education or Play. Those without a qualification were on average older compared with those who had a

qualification (44 years compared with 39 years). These results are very similar to those from the survey of registered childminders conducted for the JRF study (Mooney et al., 2001). However, there are a higher proportion of former childminders from ethnic minority groups and lone parent households in this survey compared with the JRF survey (3% and 10% respectively). This may be due to sampling, since there are more respondents from London and Metropolitan authorities than Unitary and Two-tier authorities (see Methodology, Appendix A).

**Table 2.2: Highest Educational Qualifications**

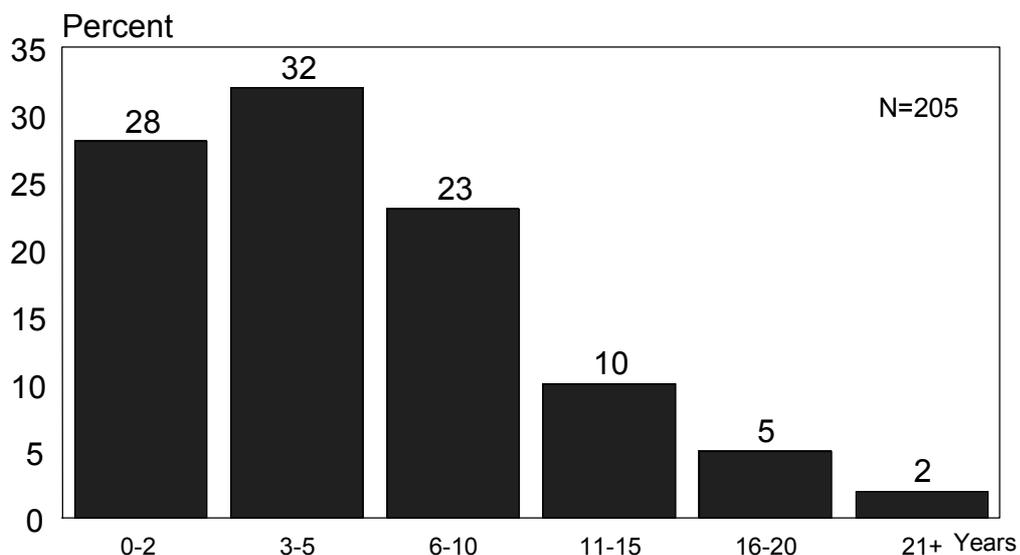
	%
GCSE/GCE 'O' level/CSE	43
'A' level	10
Degree	4
Postgraduate degree	1
Professional qualification	3
Vocational qualification	10
Other	4
None	25
N=205	

Note : 'N' denotes total

## 2.3 Motivation

2.3.1 Former childminders had been registered on average for six years, though more than one half had worked for five years or less and over a quarter for two years or less (figure 2), which is very similar to the JRF survey. However, as revealed in the JRF

**Fig. 2: Number of years registered as a childminder**



survey, childminders do not necessarily work continuously, but may choose to take breaks. Around a third of respondents had taken a break from childminding while remaining registered, compared with a quarter in the JRF survey.

2.3.2 Asked why they had taken up childminding, almost three-quarters said that it was because they wanted to stay at home with their children (Table 2.3). Almost a third mentioned wanting to work with children as a reason for taking up childminding and a third that they wanted to have an income while being at home.

**Table 2.3: Reasons for taking up childminding**

	%
To stay at home with my own children	71
Wanted to work with children	31
To have an income while being at home	30
Company for my own children	15
Really wanted to do this kind of work	12
Suggested by friends/acquaintances	11
Wanted to be self-employed	6
To care for specific children	4
Could not afford to work outside home	4
To earn an income	1
Childminding was convenient	1
Other	3
N=205	

Note: Respondents could give more than one response to this question

**Table 2:4 Main reason for taking up childminding**

	%
To stay at home with my own children	53
Wanted to work with children	14
To have an income while being at home	13
Suggested by friends/acquaintances	5
To earn an income	3
Company for own children	2
Really wanted to do this kind of work	2
To care for specific children	1
Wanted to be self-employed	1
Could not afford to work outside home	1
Childminding was convenient	1
Other	3
Don't Know	1
N=205	

- 2.3.3 Asked to give their main reason, just over half said it was being able to stay at home with their own children, followed by earning an income while being at home and wanting to work with children (Table 2.4). Again, these results are similar to the JRF survey where approximately two-thirds said that being at home with their own children was their main reason for becoming a childminder.
- 2.3.4 At the time they started childminding, more than a half (57%) of respondents said they viewed childminding as a stop-gap in their employment career or convenient for them at the time. About a third (36%) entered childminding seeing it in terms of a long-term career, and on average they remained in childminding longer than the group who saw it as a stop-gap (7 years compared with 5 years). Those seeing it as a long-term career were more likely to say they started childminding because they wanted to work with children and less likely to say they wanted to stay at home with their own children, which mirrors the JRF study findings.

## 2.4 Working as a childminder

- 2.4.1 Nearly three-quarters (71%) of former childminders had received some training in preparation for becoming a childminder although just over a quarter (29%) had not. Those who had no preparation training were not significantly older, but had been childminding longer (5 compared with 8 years;  $p < 0.01$ ). Respondents were asked about the number of children they were registered to mind and, before they made their decision to stop, the number of children they were minding, their working hours and childminding income (Table 2.5). Former childminders were on average caring for fewer children than they were registered for either because they had vacancies or were

**Table 2.5 Children, hours and income**

	n	Mean	Interquartile range <sup>1</sup>
Children registered to mind	180	4.7	3 - 6 children
Children being minded	203	2.1	1 - 3 children
Hours worked per week	205	27	12 - 40 hours
Hourly charge for a 3 year old	174	£2.24	£1.87 - £2.50
Gross weekly earnings	170	£69.68	£50.00 - £88.50

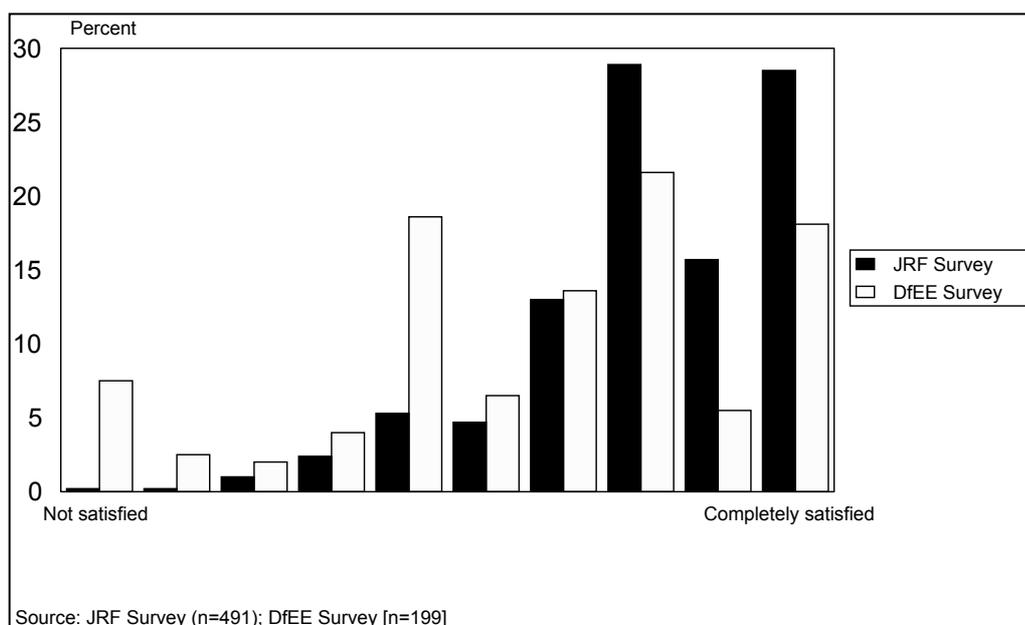
<sup>1</sup> The interquartile range is the range that includes half the respondents.

choosing not to childmind to their capacity as was apparent among some of the childminders interviewed for the JRF study. Former childminders had been childminding for 27 hours a week on average, although nearly a third (32%) were working 40 hours a week or more. A quarter (26%) worked during term-time only and a very few (3%) worked only during the school holidays. Average gross weekly income from childminding was £70. Hours and income are lower than reported for the JRF survey, where hours averaged 34 hours per week and gross weekly earnings averaged £103. It is possible that childminders start to wind-down their business with a view to stopping, which may account for the difference between the two samples. Clearly, the number of hours worked and the number of children cared for will affect income. Another explanation for the difference in the findings could be that childminders with fewer hours and therefore less income decide to stop.

## 2.5 The decision to leave childminding

2.5.1 *Satisfaction with childminding:* When respondents made the decision to stop childminding their level of satisfaction with childminding was less than recorded for childminders in the JRF survey (fig 3).

**Fig. 3: Satisfaction with childminding**



On a scale of one (not at all satisfied) to ten (very satisfied), more than half (58%) recorded a rating of six or above. This compares with 91% for the JRF survey. The

reason for this difference is taken up in the concluding chapter (paragraph 3.1), but the differences between the two samples, one of which was a sample of working childminders and the other a sample of women who had stopped childminding, may account for different findings.

**Table 2.6: All reasons given and main reason for leaving childminding**

	Main reason %	All reasons given %
<b>Wanted to do something else</b>		
Another job	22	28
Train or study	3	5
Start own business	2	3
Job opportunity arose	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Family/personal reasons</b>		
Retirement	2	3
Health problems	6	6
Marital problems	1	2
Moved	3	3
Pregnancy/birth of another child	6	7
Bereavement	1	2
Caring responsibilities	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>28</b>
Own children older	13	21
<b>Working conditions</b>		
Needed more money	5	4
Low pay	1	4
Irregular work	2	4
Long hours	-	1
No paid holidays	-	1
No paid sick leave	-	1
Right sort of work unavailable	1	1
Could not fill places	1	2
Lack of career progression	-	1
Low status of work	-	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Regulation and support</b>		
Unrealistic demands	2	3
Professionalisation of work	-	2
Childminding has changed	-	1
Lack of support/advice	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
Negative effect on family or home	4	6
Looking after specific children	3	4
Negative experience with clients	3	4
No longer wanted to work	2	3
No longer enjoyed work	1	2

2.5.2 *Reasons to stop childminding* Respondents often gave multiple reasons for leaving childminding, but also provided their main reason (Table 2.6). Reasons for leaving were varied. Wanting another job was most frequently mentioned as the main reason

(22%) followed by the reason that their own children were older (13%). Those who said they left because their children were older were asked what this meant. Returning to other employment and being able to start something new were the most frequent responses (Table 2.7). However, lack of business did not appear to be a significant reason suggesting that childminders are not stopping because of fewer hours and less income as suggested in paragraph 2.4.1.

**Table 2.7: Implications of own children older as reason to stop childminding**

	n	%
Return to other employment	12	30
Could start something new	9	23
More time to myself	7	18
Own children had started school	4	10
No need to be at home	4	10
Could meet other adults	2	5
Other	8	20
Don't know	3	8
N=40 (stopped because own children older)		

Note: Respondents could give more than one response to this question

2.5.3 Grouping some of the 31 response categories together to reduce the categories to 10 (Table 2.6), the main reason for leaving is the desire to do something else (28%), such as another job, training or studying, followed by family reasons (22%), such as pregnancy or birth of another child. Only 10% mention working conditions, such as low pay or irregular work as their main reason for leaving and even fewer mention regulation and support.

2.5.4 Although working conditions were not a main reason for leaving, they did feature more significantly when respondents were asked why they wanted another job. Around a third gave reasons associated with the working conditions of childminding, specifically better pay (24%), guaranteed work and income (7%) paid holiday and/or sick leave (3%). More than a quarter (28%) said they wanted to work outside the home and one in five felt that another job gave them greater satisfaction (Table 2.8).

**Table 2.8: Why respondents wanted another job**

	n	%
To work outside home	16	28
Better pay	14	24
Greater satisfaction	11	19
Came to a natural end	9	16
Own children started school	8	14
Adult company	8	14
Guaranteed work/income	4	7
Paid holidays/sick leave	2	3
Less hassle	2	3
To use qualifications	2	3
Other	4	7
N=58 who said wanted another job		

Note: Respondents could give more than one response to this question

2.5.5 In the JRF study the main reasons given by working childminders to stop childminding were another job (30%), their age (22%), the needs of their children (13%) and that their children had reached school age (11%).

2.5.6 *Timing of cancellation:* Two-thirds had cancelled their registration in 1999 and a third in 2000. While just over a third (37%) cancelled their registration around the time they finished minding their last child(ren), nearly two-thirds (63%) cancelled their registration later. Although the majority (84%) cancelled within a year of not childminding, a small minority cancelled their registration between one and eight years after ceasing to childmind.

2.5.7 Although three-quarters of the sample wanted to stop childminding at the time that they had, almost a quarter had not wanted to stop at that point. They would or may have continued childminding if circumstances had been different. Better pay was most frequently mentioned by these 55 respondents as a factor that would have encouraged them to continue childminding, although almost a quarter said they would have continued if specific parents or children, such as a relative, still required their service (Table 2.9).

**Table 2.9: Factors which may have changed decision to stop childminding**

	n	%
Better pay	23	42
Specific parents/children needed me	12	22
Regular hours	8	15
Guaranteed work/income	4	7
More children to look after	5	9
More support	5	9
Paid holidays/sick leave	3	5
More training	3	5
Less stringent/expensive regulation	3	5
Other	9	16
N=55 (all who would have continued childminding if circumstances different)		

Note: Respondents could give more than one response to this question

## **2.6 Careers after childminding**

2.6.1 Over two-thirds (70%) had undertaken some paid employment since ceasing to childmind and around two-thirds (65%) were currently working at the time of the interview. Respondents were most likely to have jobs in administrative/clerical (23%), sales/service (23%), school (22%) and childcare (16%) sectors. Since leaving childminding almost a third (30%) of this sample of former childminders had worked or did work in jobs related to childcare, of whom about one half (48%) considered that their experience as a childminder had influenced their decision to move into these jobs. Childcare-related jobs tended to be either within primary school classrooms as assistants or working in childcare facilities (e.g. nursery, playgroup, creche). Those with a childcare qualification were more likely to move on to childcare-related employment. Thus, of the 62 women in childcare-related jobs, 70% had a childcare qualification and 26% did not. Of the 81 women in non childcare-related employment, 30% had a childcare qualification compared with 74% who did not.

2.6.2 Those never having been in childcare-related employment since leaving childminding were asked if they would take such a job in the future. Table 2.10 shows that in addition to the third who have had or are working in childcare-related jobs, a further third will (14%) or may (20%) take such work in the future.

**Table 2.10: Employment since leaving childminding and if respondents will work in childcare-related employment in the future**

	Never Employed		Employed, non childcare		Employed in childcare		Totals	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Will work in childcare in future	16	8	12	6			28	14
May work in childcare in future	19	9	22	11			41	20
Will not work in childcare in future	25	12	46	22			71	34
Don't know	2	1	1	1			3	2
Employed in childcare now					62	30	62	30
Totals	62	30	81	40	62	30	<b>205</b>	<b>100</b>

2.6.2 In their new jobs the majority worked part-time hours, both during term-time and school holidays. Working hours on average were less than when they were childminding (23 hours compared with 27 hours) with only 5% (compared with 32%) working more than 40 hours (Table 2.11). Less than two thirds were working during both term time and school holidays and more than a third were working only during term time. As childminders, more worked during school holidays than did so in their new jobs (72% compared with 61%).

**Table 2.11: Hours former childminders are currently working**

Hours	%
2-10	14
11-20	41
21-30	17
31-40	24
41+	5
N=132 currently working	

2.6.3 The majority felt that compared with childminding their employment since leaving childminding was better and very few considered their job compared less favourably with childminding (Table 2.12). Improved working conditions, particularly pay, the opportunity to interact with other adults and the work being more challenging were the most frequently mentioned reasons why respondents believed their current jobs were better.



**Table 2:14: Likelihood of returning to childminding**

	%
Very likely	5
Likely	14
Not very likely	22
Very unlikely	57
Don't know	2
N=205	

2.7.2 However, asked if anything would persuade them to return to childminding, about a third (30%) of the sample thought they could or may be persuaded to return in the future. A higher income, mentioned by more than a third, and changes in family circumstances were the most commonly cited reasons, which may persuade former childminders to return (Table 2.15). The 'other' category included a range of responses. Five were to do with changes in working conditions, such as taxation, better protection, support, the way childminding is organised and three were to do with relationships with parents and children, for example 'if someone could guarantee I wouldn't get attached to the kids'.

**Table 2.15: Factors which would persuade a return to childminding**

	n	%
<b>Working conditions</b>		
Childminding paid more	22	36
Guaranteed work/income	2	3
More children in the area	2	3
Higher status	4	7
Less stringent regulations	6	10
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Personal reasons</b>		
Family circumstances change	13	21
Lost job or couldn't find work	4	7
A bigger house/more room	3	5
Better health	2	3
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>36</b>
Other	13	21
Don't know	1	2
N=61 who might be persuaded to return		

Note: Respondents could give more than one response to this question

## **2.8 Summary of results**

- 2.8.1 Women tend to undertake childminding so that they can remain at home with their own children when they are young. When they embark upon childminding, it is often seen more as a convenient or stop-gap form of employment than a long-term career. Childminders continue childminding for six years on average, though there is evidence of high turnover in that as many as a quarter had left childminding within two years of starting.
- 2.8.2 The most common reason to stop childminding is to take another job. Alternative employment offers better working conditions, greater satisfaction and opportunities for more social contact. The decision to leave often comes at the time their children are older and at school, though we do not know how soon after their children start school that they seek alternative employment. Although the majority are not persuaded to change their decision about leaving, improved working conditions, particularly pay, may entice some to continue with childminding.
- 2.8.3 Although about a third (30%) went into childcare-related jobs, usually working as assistants in classrooms and childcare facilities, the majority do not pursue a career with children when they leave childminding. Around one in five (19%) think it likely they will return to childminding, although more (30%) consider they might be persuaded particularly if childminding offered a better income, though changes in their family circumstances were also considered as a reason for returning to childminding.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

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- 3.1 The findings from this survey and the JRF survey (Mooney et al., 2001) are remarkably similar. Where there are differences, these may be due to the samples. The JRF survey involved working childminders who were basing their responses on their current situation. Former childminders were recalling information across a one or two year period. It is likely that childminders who are thinking about ceasing to childmind gradually reduce the number of children they care for, thereby reducing their hours and consequently their income. Their decision to stop childminding may also affect their satisfaction with the work, or alternatively less satisfaction may lead to a decision to leave.
- 3.2 Although four in five former childminders are unlikely to return to childminding once they have left, this does not mean that they have no interest in further work involving children. One third of the sample had moved to other childcare-related jobs following childminding and a further third thought they might do so in the future. This suggests that former childminders, particularly those with a childcare qualification, want to work with children and may therefore be recruited into alternative childcare-related employment. Increasing opportunities for childminders to gain a recognised childcare qualification and encouraging them to do so, while at the same time raising awareness of the childcare-related jobs that could be available to them, may result in more moving into other types of childcare-related jobs when they stop childminding where their training and experience can be capitalised upon.
- 3.3 It is clear that poor working conditions, particularly low pay, is a significant reason why childminders do not continue with this work. Other research supports this finding. In a survey of childcare providers, childminders said the greatest obstacle to continuing as a childminder was financial viability (Callender, 2000). In the JRF study, local authority and NCMA officers pointed to poor pay and low status as the reason why childminding was not an attractive employment choice for women, who now had greater access to alternative employment offering flexible working hours and better pay. Furthermore, it was suggested that the nature of the work is changing with a growing demand for part-time, sessional and non-standard hours reflecting the

changes in mothers' working hours. Not only may this make childminding less satisfying, but also it may become more difficult to make it financially viable. Although low pay does appear to be one reason pushing childminders to seek alternative employment, which in turn may be due to not having sufficient business to make childminding economically viable, not being able to fill vacancies or find business was rarely mentioned as a reason for stopping.

- 3.4 Other reasons put forward by local authority and NCMA officers in the JRF study to explain the decline in the numbers of childminders did not feature as significant reasons for these former childminders. Very few mentioned tighter regulation or competition from other types of childcare as the reason why they had stopped childminding. In fact, childminders interviewed for the JRF study overwhelmingly endorsed regulation and, where there was criticism, it was concerned with the process of registration and inspection. Analysis done for the same study, using official statistics, found no correlation between changes in the numbers of childminders and changes in the numbers of other types of childcare services (day nurseries, playgroups and out-of-school services) between 1997 and 1999, at a local authority level.
- 3.5 It is important to note that the interviews conducted with former childminders, in the survey and the JRF study, can only provide information on why childminders have left the occupation recently. As there is no baseline information for the mid-1990s, these interviews cannot throw light on change over time, especially the declining numbers of childminders since 1996. We cannot say, for instance, if there have been changes in the reasons childminders give for ceasing to childmind or in what they go on to do afterwards.
- 3.6 The survey suggests that if childminding offered a higher income it is likely that more childminders would want to continue and others would be drawn back into the profession. It is also likely that with improved working conditions, particularly pay, childminding would be seen as a more attractive employment option. There is no available data to indicate by how much their income needs to rise and the percentage of childminders this would attract or retain.

- 3.7 Increasing childminders' income has no easy resolution. Childminders themselves feel they are not in a position to increase their fees. They feel they run the danger of pricing themselves out of the market if they raise their fees and are all too aware of the effect price increases might have on parents (Mooney et al., 2001). With the introduction of the Childcare Tax Credit (CCTC) in 1999, which subsidises the childcare costs of lower income working parents, it was thought that childcare providers would be in a position to command higher fees. Latest statistics on CCTC show that 129,000 families received this benefit in November 2000, 90% of whom were lone parents, with an average award of £35.10 a week. Childminding was the type of childcare for which CCTC was most frequently awarded, accounting for 48% of total awards (61,600 families); in a further 9% of cases, the award covered more than one type of childcare provision, some of which may have been childminders (Inland Revenue, 2000).
- 3.8 There is, however, little evidence to date on the impact of CCTC on fees or earnings of childcare providers, including childminders. Childminder fees have not increased significantly since the introduction of CCTC (NCMA personal communication). The effectiveness of this new benefit as a means to enhance the working conditions of childminders, in particular earnings, remains uncertain.
- 3.9 There are other possible ways of enhancing the position of childminders, including their pay. A recent development in Britain has been the establishment of formal local networks of childminders, via an approved scheme organised by the NCMA. This involves the assessment, recruitment and monitoring of registered childminders by a network coordinator. Childminders within a network enjoy certain benefits, including greater access to training opportunities, the chance to use network resources, the help and advice of the network coordinator, and the possibility of being eligible to receive a Nursery Education Grant for work with 3 and 4 year olds. The DfES (formerly DfEE), via EYDCPs, is encouraging the expansion of these networks. One option would be to extend the existing benefits for network members, to include for example some form of income supplement or guarantee.
- 3.10 Another possible way forward, extensively used in several other European countries, is some form of salaried childminding. Under this system childminders are assessed,

recruited, supported and paid by an agency (which might be a local authority or private organisation). Parents pay the agency and the agency pays the childminders, usually with a substantial subsidy from public funds. Applied in Britain, this option would involve a shift in public policy from subsidising some parents through tax credits, to subsidising all providers through the payment of salaries. Furthermore, such an option would require childminders to cede their independence and assume employee status. (For further discussion of salaried childminding in Europe, see Karlsson, 1995).

- 3.11 A third of the childminders in the survey had entered childminding seeing it in terms of a longer-term career. But for many women childminding is seen as convenient while their children are young. When their children are older and at school, they are likely to look for alternative employment and are unlikely to return to childminding unless their family or personal circumstances change. This situation is sustainable only while there are sufficient numbers of women willing to become childminders while their children are young and replace those that leave. There is evidence, however, to suggest that the pool of women from which childminders have been traditionally drawn is shrinking. In the past, childminders have tended to have lower levels of education and be possibly less well placed to return to work after childbirth. However, the level of education has been rising (e.g. 94% of school leavers in 1999 had at least one GCSE (DfEE, 1999)) and women are having fewer children and having them when they are older. More women are now in a position to pursue a career and pay for childcare. At the same time, there is increasing competition for female labour resulting in alternative employment opportunities with greater flexibility in terms of hours and offering better rewards than in the past.
- 3.12 Measures such as the childcare recruitment campaign, introduction of start-up grants and the development of childminder networks eligible for nursery education grant may increase the number of registered childminders. NCMA have recently noted an upturn in membership enquiries, which may indicate an increase in entrants to the occupation (NCMA personal communication). However, although nearly one in five of the childminders in the survey thought it likely that they would return to childminding, the overall results suggest that unless there is an improvement in the

working conditions of childminders, such policies are unlikely to improve retention among the childminding workforce.

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## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

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- A.1 The intention was to achieve 25 telephone interviews with people who had come off the childminder register in the last two years in each of ten local authorities. The most effective way to obtain details of former childminders is through local authorities who administer the childminder register. Local authorities were therefore contacted to establish the feasibility of obtaining former childminder details from at least ten local authorities.
- A.2 Local authorities were randomly selected to provide a representative distribution, both geographically and by type of authority. Between July and September 2000, 27 authorities were approached, of which 11 authorities provided lists of former childminders. Of the remaining 16 authorities, 12 refused due to data protection restrictions, two because they did not have the resources to retrieve the information and two authorities were unable to give a definitive response. Compared with London and Metropolitan authorities, Unitary and Two-tier authorities were more likely to fail to provide information (see table A.1).
- A.3 The 11 authorities providing lists of former childminders represented Inner (3) and Outer (4) London, Metropolitan (3) and Two-tier (1) authorities. These authorities provided a total sample of 756 former childminders. The telephone numbers of the sample were checked with their names and addresses using computerised directories by the agency contracted to conduct the survey. The agency has considerable expertise in conducting surveys of this nature. Former childminders were randomly selected from each authority and contacted by telephone for an interview. The interview schedule (see Appendix B) was designed and piloted by the research team. Fieldwork commenced in November and December 2000 with the aim of achieving 250 interviews.

**Table A.1: Responses of authorities approached by type of authority and number of childminders**

Type of authority	Number of Childminders*	Agreed
Inner London:	1	Yes
	2	Yes
	3	Yes
	4	No
	5	No response
	6	No
Outer London:	7	Yes
	8	Yes
	9	Yes
	10	Yes
	11	No
	12	No
Metropolitan:	13	Yes
	14	Yes
	15	Yes
	16	No
	17	No
	18	No
Two-Tier:	19	Yes
	20	No
	21	No
	22	No
	23	No
	24	No
Unitary:	25	No
	26	No
	27	No response

\*Note: Figures are for 1998, the last year for which they are supplied by authority

A.4 As can be seen from table A.2, 111 of the total sample were ineligible for interview including 25 respondents who were never childminders and 9 who were still childminding. From a possible sample of 645, completed interviews were achieved with 205 former childminders – a response rate of 32%. However, it proved impossible to contact 40% of the sample because the telephone number was wrong or unobtainable or the person had moved.

A.5 Of the 342 childminders who were contacted and who met the criteria for interview, 137 (40%) refused to be interviewed. We do not have data on the reasons why they refused an interview. The response rate varied across different types of areas. The response rate achieved in outer London authorities was 39%, 25% from metropolitan

authorities, 24% from two-tier authorities and 12% in inner London local authority areas.

**Table A.2: Details of sample response**

	Respondents
<b>Total sample</b>	<b>756</b>
<b>Ineligible for interview:</b>	
Stopped c/m pre 1999	77
Never a childminder	25
Still childminding	9
Total	111
<b>Possible sample</b>	<b>645</b>
<b>Unable to contact:</b>	
Number unobtainable	119
Fax/modem	5
Wrong number	80
Moved	54
<b>Not possible to interview:</b>	
Illness/death	3
Language difficulties	1
Unavailable	2
<b>No contact made</b>	39
<b>Refusals</b>	137
Total	440
<b>Completed interviews</b>	<b>205</b>

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

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## THOMAS CORAM RESEARCH UNIT

### Draft interview schedule for telephone interviews with former childminders

Intro: Good morning/afternoon/evening my name is      and I am calling from      an independent research company. Your name was given to us by your local authority in respect to a survey of former childminders that we are undertaking for the Thomas Coram Research Unit, at London University. We want to find out about working as a childminder, the reasons why people stop childminding and what they go on to do. I have a few questions to ask you, but it will take no more than 15 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers. All information you give us is confidential. We will not identify you in any publication, nor will we pass your details to anyone outside the research team at Thomas Coram Research Unit.

1. How long were you registered as a childminder?

Months                      Years

2. When did you cancel your registration?

Month                      Year

3. Did you cancel your registration at the time your last minded children left or later?

Never minded any children    *(if respondent meets 2 year criteria go to question 6)*  
At the same time                *(if respondent meets 2 year criteria go to question 5)*  
Later

4. How long after you stopped childminding did you cancel your registration?

Month                      Year

If respondent cancelled registration more than two years ago, thank them for their help and explain that we are interviewing former childminders who cancelled their registration in the last two years.

5. Did you have children all of that time or were there gaps/breaks when you didn't have children?

Childminding continuously  
Breaks in childminding  
Never minded any children

6. Why did you take up childminding? (*If more than one reason ask question 7*)

- To stay at home with my own children
- To have an income while being at home
- Couldn't afford to work outside home (e.g. childcare costs)
- Wanted to work with children / Liked children
- Really wanted to do this kind of work (*Ask: Why?*)
- Wanted to be self/employed or run own business
- Suggested by friends/acquaintances
- Wanted to care for specific children
- Company for my own child
- Other (*Specify*)

7. What was your main reason?

- To stay at home with my own children
- To have an income while being at home
- Couldn't afford to work outside home (e.g. childcare costs)
- Wanted to work with children / Liked children
- Really wanted to do this kind of work (*Ask: Why?*)
- Wanted to be self/employed or run own business
- Suggested by friends/acquaintances
- Wanted to care for specific children
- Company for my own child
- Other (*Specify*)

8. Did you do any training in preparation for becoming a childminder either before or soon after you started?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure/can't remember

9. When you started childminding did you see it as:

- A stop-gap (temporary or short-term) or convenient at the time
- A long-term career
- Don't know

10. How many children were you registered to mind? (*Do not include respondent's own children*)

\_\_\_\_\_ Under 5 years                      \_\_\_\_\_ Over 5 years

11. What was your usual hourly charge, taking a three year old as average? *(Take weekly rate if unable to provide hourly charge)*

£ \_\_\_\_\_ (hourly)

£ \_\_\_\_\_ (weekly)

Can't remember

Refused to answer

12. On average, how much were you earning from childminding each week (before tax, national insurance and expenses)? Please remember your answers are confidential.

£ \_\_\_\_\_

Can't remember

Refused to answer

Never minded any children *(go to question 17)*

13. Were you childminding part-time or full-time? *(N.B. Want what hours respondent was working, not hours of children)*

Full time, (i.e.30+ hours a week)

Part time (i.e. less than 30 hours a week)

Varied

14. Were you childminding in term-time, school holidays or both?

Term-time only

School holidays only

Both term time and school holidays

15. Were you working on your own or with another registered childminder?

On own

With another childminder

16. How many children were you minding before you stopped?

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17. On a scale from 1 to 10, how satisfied were you with working as a childminder when you decided to stop? 1 is not at all satisfied and 10 is very satisfied.

Not at all

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

Very satisfied

10

18. Why did you stop childminding (or cancel your registration if never minded children)?  
(Write responses to code later) *PROMPT* Anything else? *UNTIL NO FURTHER RESPONSE: (If only one response after prompt go to question 22)*

All 1st 2nd

**Personal/Family Reasons**

Retirement/age

Health problems

Marital problems

Moved

Pregnancy/birth of another child

Bereavement

Caring responsibilities

Negative effect on own family

Own children older or gone to school (**\*what does this mean?\***)

**Employment/Education**

Wanted another job or wanted to move on (**\*Ask question 21\***)

Wanted/needed more money

Not working is more advantageous financially  
(e.g. can claim benefits if not working)

No longer wanted/needed to work

Wanted to train/study (*SPECIFY*)

**Childminding Reasons**

Low pay

Irregular work

Long hours

No paid holidays

No paid sick leave

No pension

Only looking after specific children and arrangement ended

Couldn't get work or the right sort of work as a childminder (e.g. only  
wanted babies or only wanted to work p/t)

Couldn't fill sufficient places to generate enough income

Lack of career progression/professional development

Negative experiences with minded children and/or parents

No longer enjoyed the work (*WHY?*)

Low status of work/job (not valued)

Professionalisation of work (e.g. more emphasis on training, education and/or  
paperwork)

Childminding has changed? (*How?*)

**Regulations**

Fear that it will become more difficult when OFSTED take over inspection

Unrealistic expectations/demands of inspectors (under 8's officers) (e.g. too much red  
tape, too much hassle)

Unable to meet registration requirements and childminder cancelled registration

LA cancelled childminder's registration

Lack of support/advice for LA

Didn't want to pay inspection fee

Other (*Specify*)

19. If more than one reason mentioned: What was your main reason for stopping? (*go to q22*)

20. If more than two reasons: What was your second main reason? (*go to q22*)

21. Why did you want another job/to move on?

*PROMPT*: Anything else

Came to a natural end

Own children had started school

Wanted to work outside the home (other than for social reasons)

Social reasons

Better pay

Guaranteed work/income

Paid holidays and/or sick leave

Less hassle working in another job

More satisfaction from different type of work

Other (*Specify*)

22. Did you want to stop childminding at that point?

Yes

No

Not sure

23. Would anything have changed your mind about stopping?

Yes

Maybe

No

(*Go to question 25*)

DK

(*Go to question 25*)

Registration cancelled by local authority

(*Go to question 25*)

24. What would have made a difference? (*tick all that apply*)

*PROMPT*: Anything else?

Better pay

Guaranteed work/income

Regular hours

Paid holidays and/or sick leave

Less stringent regulations

Less expensive regulation/inspection

Better image/status of childcare or childminding

More support (*Ask: From whom?*)

More training/professional development/career progression

Other (*Specify*)

25. Since you stopped childminding have you done any paid work?

Yes (Go to question 27)

No

26. Do you think you may take a job related to childcare in the future?

Yes

Maybe

No

D.K.

*(Go to question 41)*

27. How many paid jobs have you had? Include all jobs including part-time and jobs you have done at the same time.

\_\_\_\_\_

28. What job(s) have you been doing since you stopped childminding? (*Get job title and, if not clear, employer*)

29. Have any of your jobs been related to childcare?

Yes (Go to question 31)

No

30. Do you think you may take a job related to childcare in the future?

Yes

Maybe

No

DK

*Go to question 35*

31. Have you had more than one job related to childcare?

Yes (*ask question 32 and 33 for each job if more than one*)

No

32. What is or was the job title of the job?

33. What type of employer is or was it?

- Private day nursery
- Local authority day nursery
- Playgroup/pre-school
- Playwork/after school club/holiday scheme
- Family centre
- Parent (if working as nanny)
- Local authority nursery school/class or primary class
- Private school
- Local authority (registration officer/development worker)
- Other (*Specify*)

34. Did your experience as a childminder influence you to move into this/these job(s)?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- D.K

35. Are you currently working?

- Yes
- No (*Go to question 39*)

36. What are you doing (get job title and employer if not clear)?

37. How many hours a week do you work? \_\_\_\_\_

38. Is this during term-time, school holidays or both?

- Term-time only
- School holidays only
- Both term time and school holidays

39. (Taking current or last job) How does/did this job compare with childminding? Was it:

- Better
- Not so good
- No different (*Go to question 41*)
- D.K. (*Go to question 41*)

40. How was it better or not so good as childminding?

Better pay  
Regular hours  
Guaranteed work/income  
More enjoyable (*Why?*)  
Work is more challenging  
Work is less challenging  
Provided adult company  
Less hassle  
Didn't have to work from home  
Miss caring for children  
Miss interactions with parents  
Not my own boss  
Don't like people I work with  
Having to commute (not being at home)  
Greater respect  
Other (*Specify*)

41. Since you stopped childminding have you done any training/studying?

Yes  
No (*Go to question 47*)

42. Is or was this related to children? (childcare, early years)

Yes  
No (*Go to question 47*)

43. What have you been doing? (*get course title, subject and level, e.g. Psychology 'A' Level; Nursery nursing NVQ3.*)

44. Is/was this full-time or part-time?

Full-time  
Part-time

45. Are you studying/training now?

Yes full-time  
Yes part-time  
No (*Go to Q47*)

46. Is this the same course related to childcare you just mentioned or something different (*If different get details as before*)?

Same as just mentioned  
Something different (*Ask Q43 & Q44 for this course*)

47. Thinking about whether you would ever go back to childminding, would you say it is:

- Very likely
- Likely
- Not very likely
- Very unlikely
- D.K.

48. Is there anything that would persuade you to go back to childminding?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No (Go to question 50)
- D.K. (Go to question 50)

49. What would make a difference?

- Family circumstances change
- Lost job or couldn't find other work
- It paid more
- Having guaranteed work/income
- Less regulations and red tape with inspections
- Higher status/work valued
- Other (*specify*)

I'd now like to ask some questions that will help us describe the group of people we have interviewed.

50. How old are you?

51. Are you male or female?

- Male
- Female

52. Are you living on your own (*i.e. with no partner*) or living in a couple?

- Couple
- On own

53. Which ethnic group do you belong to? Are you:

- White
- Asian
- Black
- Other (*Specify*)

54. Do you have any educational qualifications?

Yes

No (Go to question 56)

55. If yes, what is your highest qualification? (*If unsure, write down and code later*)

GCSE/GCE 'O' level/CSE/Equivalent

'A' Level

Degree

Postgraduate degree

Professional qualifications (e.g. PGCE, CQSW)

Vocational qualifications (e.g. S/NVQ, BTEC)

Other (*Specify*)

56. Do you have a qualification relating to childcare or teaching?

Yes

No (*go to question 58*)

57. If yes, what qualification have you got?

S/NVQ Childcare & Education or Playwork

PLA playgroup Course or Diploma

NNEB/CACHE Diploma in Nursery Nursing

CACHE Certificate or Diploma in Childcare and Education (*ASK: What level?*)

Teaching qualification (PGCE or BEd)

NCMA Developing Childminding Practice (DCPI or II)

City & Guilds 3240 – Caring for children 0-7

BTEC National Diploma in Nursery Nursing

Other (*Specify*)

58. Do you have any children of your own? (*include fostered/adopted and step children*)

Yes

No (*go to question 60*)

59. How old are they? (*get age for each child*)

60. Do you have a disability or long-term health problem?

Yes

No

THAT WAS VERY HELPFUL. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

Add standard closing statement