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Childminders are well placed to play a vital role in the delivery of the 30 hours offer

Participation in quality improvement networks and experience are all key in promoting higher quality provision among childminders, says new report

Today sees the publication of the latest report from the Study of Early Education and Development (SEED), a major government longitudinal study evaluating early education in England. The report has been written by Professor Edward Melhuish, University of Birkbeck and 4Children, following a study of the quality of childminder provision in England.

The report identifies three key factors distinguishing the quality of care provided by childminders.

Key factors influencing quality include:

- Participation in a quality improvement network: This had a positive influence on the quality of the childminder's provision, particularly in distinguishing between those with a 'good' rating or higher from those with a lower rating.
- Years of experience as a childminder: This factor distinguished outstanding settings from the rest.
- A setting with a lower adult-to-child ratio (less children per adult) was more likely to have an adequate or above quality score, rather than a poor rating. Adult-to-child ratio did not appear to distinguish between the quality delivered at the higher end (adequate to good / outstanding).

The research involved consultants carrying out observational visits and short interviews within 100 childminder settings, focusing on:

- The characteristics of the childminder i.e. the formal education, training and experience and whether they were part of a quality improvement network or scheme
- What occurs within the setting i.e. children's interactions with the childminder and other children, activities, and health and safety
- The structure of the setting i.e. the child: adult ratio; learning environment and access to stimulating play opportunities

Further data from the study include:

- Three quarters of childminders taking part in the study were registered with the Local Authority to deliver funded places for two year old children
- Almost half of childminders in the study were providing one or more funded early education places for three and four year olds.

- Almost all of the childminders were open to care for children with Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEN/D). On fifth cared for a child with SEN/D
- Only half of childminders involved in the study were participating in a quality improvement programme or a quality assurance scheme (QIP/QAS)

Education and Childcare Minister, Sam Gyimah, said: *“We want parents to have a choice of a diverse range of childcare providers and peace of mind that if they choose to return to work, their children are getting the best quality childcare. We know that childminders are an essential part of this. That’s why we have changed the rules and provided start-up funding to make it easier for registered childminders to provide the 15 hours free childcare for three- and four-year-olds, and the latest figures show that 6,100 childminders are doing this.”*

Sue Robb, Head of Early Years at 4Children said: *“Childminders are an invaluable part of the early years workforce, providing high quality care in the kind of personal, homely environment that many parents favour.*

“This report highlights the excellent work many childminders are doing. It also points to certain aspects that have a real impact on quality delivery, one of which is being part of a quality improvement network. We’d like to see far more than 50% of childminders benefitting from membership to a professional network- whether it’s run by the local authority; childminder agency; a professional association or a local group.

“Childminders are well placed to help deliver the free 30 hours offer, but in order for the programme to succeed, we need to establish a more blended, model of community childcare whereby childcare providers across the community work together to drive up quality and meet demand. Quality improvement networks can help to facilitate this and bring about the kind of community childcare model that will reap the greatest rewards for the sector and families in the future.”

Professor Edward Melhuish, Early Years expert and report author said: *Childminders are very important for early child care. Our report shows that they can provide good quality child care, and that quality is improved by professional development. Local authorities have a big role to play in ensuring the availability of professional development for childminders, and professional associations also play a role. For the development of a complete early years service, we need to see childminders better integrated with other preschool providers, such as nursery schools, primary schools with nursery classes as well as day nurseries and playgroups.”*

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Notes to the Editor

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A sample of 99 childminders were observed and interviewed across five regions of the country: the North West, North East, Midlands, London and the South. The observations were carried out between September 2014 and March 2015.

The Study of Early Education and Development (SEED), which follows the progress of 6,000 two and three year old children through to age seven, was commissioned by the Department for Education and undertaken by NatCen Social Research, the University of Oxford, 4Children and Frontier Economics.