

Building Blocks 2018

A report on the state of the childcare and early years sector in Wales

Wales



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Building Blocks (Wales) 2018

A report on the state of the childcare and early years sector in Wales

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Introduction

PACEY's third annual **Building Blocks survey** sought the views all childcare and early years professionals working in England and for the first time those working in Wales. It provides a valuable, regular health check on the state of the childcare and early years sector. This report specifically looks at the findings of the Building Blocks for Wales survey for 2018. A future report for Wales, in the series, will follow the publication of this report and focus on the Childcare Offer for Wales.

The survey looked at a wide range of issues affecting the childcare and early years workforce, including experience, continuous professional development, working conditions, finances and future plans. As such, it provides a valuable health check and evidence on the state of the childcare and early years sector in Wales.

Childcare and early years are at the top of the political agenda with the pilot and implementation of the Childcare Offer for Wales and the development and implementation of a new suite of childcare qualifications for the sector. This is despite challenges such as Brexit and a shrinking economy.

The expansion of the Childcare Offer for Wales pilot areas leading to full implementation across Wales by September 2020 will support working families with the cost of childcare¹. Middle and lower income families will receive further help with childcare costs through Tax-Free Childcare and Universal Credit. Flying Start also provides childcare opportunities for the families of eligible 2-3-year olds in many parts of Wales². The work driven by Qualifications Wales around development of a new suite of Health & Social Care and Childcare qualifications for Wales from September 2019 will replace more than 200 current qualifications which will be available for delivery in schools, further education and work based learning³.

What impact have these developments had on the childcare and early years practitioners working across the 3851 registered childcare and play settings in Wales, including 1927 childminders, and in addition the 113 nannies on Care Inspectorate for Wales' (CIW) Voluntary Approval Scheme? Our recent research looked at the increase in childminding de-registrations in Wales⁴ and the issue, that is now resolved but was on-going while the survey was live, around childminders being unable to access Childcare Offer funding for related children⁵ provided evidence that the sector continues to be under strain.

What we found

The first Building Blocks survey for Wales paints a picture of a sector that is highly experienced, dedicated and committed to improvement. However, it has also revealed a number of key points for concern around sustainability and improvement.

Our key findings specifically for childminders in Wales include these points:

- The childcare and early years profession is fluid, with people moving in and out of different, related roles throughout their career but staying in the sector for the long haul
- Childcare and early years professionals find their work highly rewarding and are motivated to improve
- Financial confidence for the future is high in Wales with 73 per cent stating they were more confident or as confident for the next twelve months compared to the previous twelve months.
- The majority of settings have unfilled places and no plans to expand in the next year.

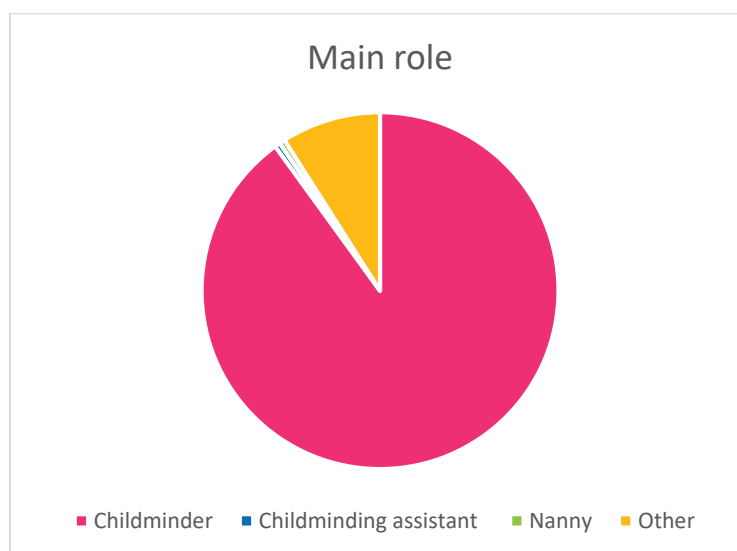
We make a series of recommendations at the end of this report which outline the key points to be considered- at a national and local level- by all those working with the sector. This will ensure positive outcomes for the substantial public investment in the sector, and ensure access to high quality childcare and early education in Wales that meets the needs of children and their families.

Methodology

The Building Blocks for Wales 2018 survey was carried out online between March and May 2018. We received 186 responses in total, mainly from childminders from every local authority area in Wales.

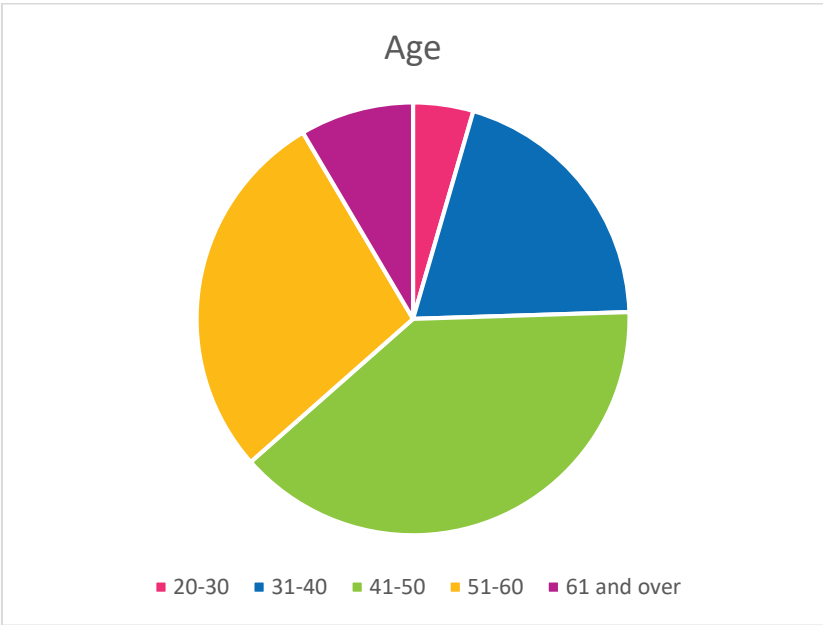
Profile of respondents

The majority (90 per cent) of the respondents worked primarily in childminding settings. Less than 1 per cent of responses were from nannies and the other 9 per cent stated they were from ‘other roles’ in the childcare and early years sector including day nurseries, playgroups, schools and Local Authorities.

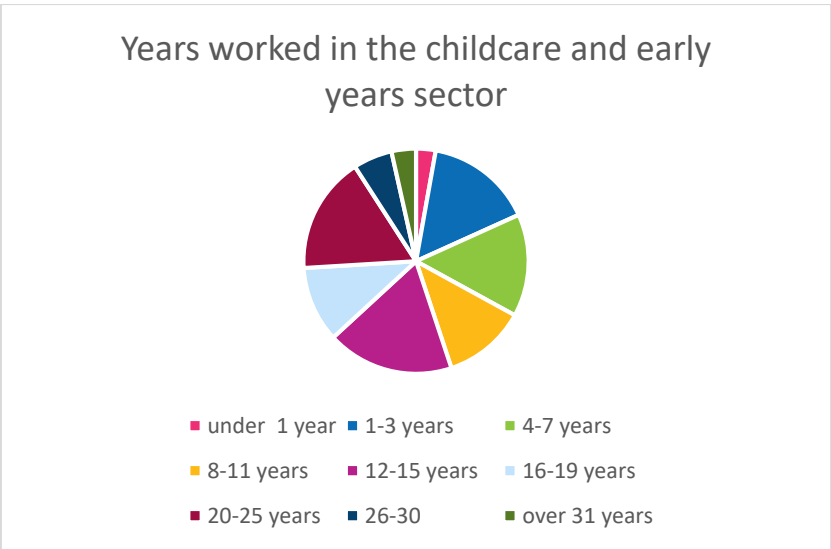


The age profile of those who responded showed that over 36% were over the age of 50 with only 5% being under the age of 30. We know this is in part due to the fact that many childminders enter the profession when they have young children themselves and the age at which mothers are giving birth has increased in recent years with the majority being over 30⁶. This could potentially provide a sustainability issue for the

sector in decades to come with many current childminders reaching retirement age.



The length of time that those who responded have worked in the sector shows that 26 per cent reported having worked in childcare and/or early years roles for 20 years or more. 42 per cent have worked in the sector for eight to 19 years with 19 per cent having worked in the sector for less than 3 years.



The fluidity of roles within the sector is clear from the results of this survey. 72 per cent of respondents have worked in more than one role within the sector. Of those currently working as a childminder it was found that registered childminders have come from a variety of roles within the sector including full day care, nannying, sessional care, before/after school or holiday clubs and school (maintained) settings in the past.

Childcare and early years practice

One of the core aims of the Building Blocks survey is to shed light on the nature of modern-day childcare and early years practice. The portrait of childcare and early years which emerges is of a profession that is varied and highly fulfilling, in which people tend to stay for years.

Services provided

We know from our work at PACEY that childcare and early years settings are continuously evolving to meet the changing needs of working parents. Unsurprisingly, our survey found that childminders provide flexible care, with 77 per cent offering care before 8am and 30 per cent providing care after 6pm. Less than two per cent of respondents from childminding settings reported offering overnight care and seven per cent provide weekend care.



Children with additional needs

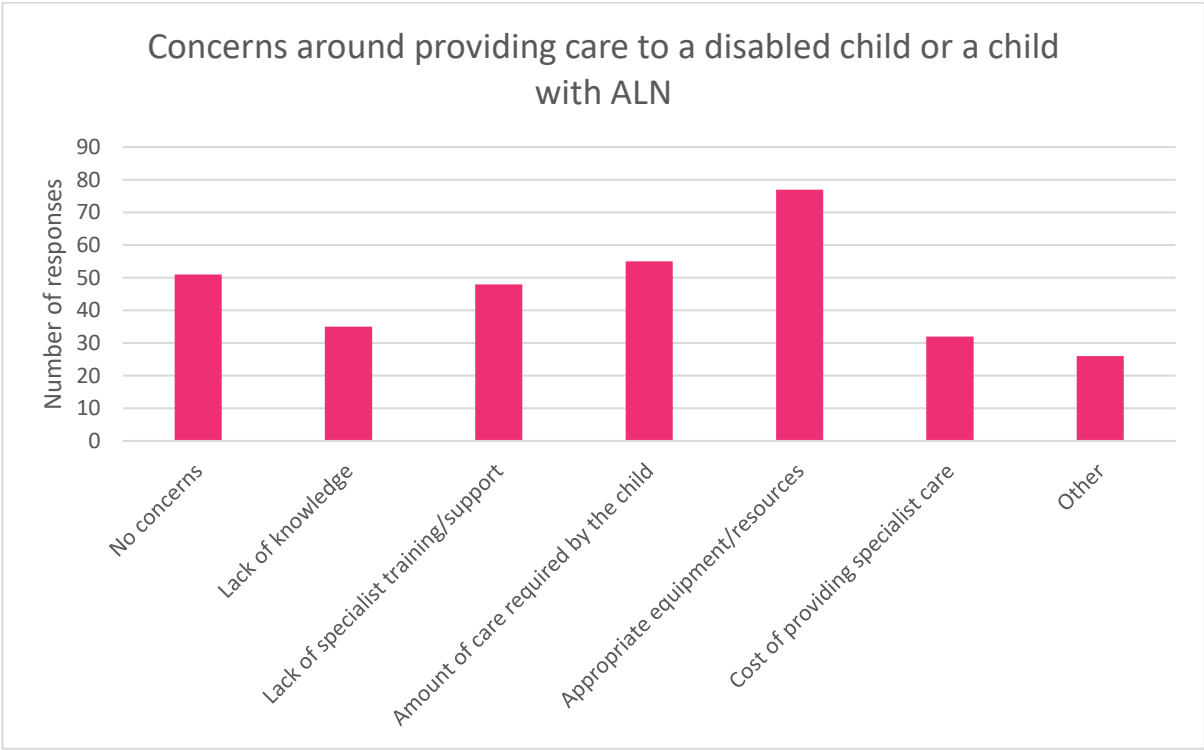
21 per cent of those who responded stated that they cared for a disabled child or a child with additional learning needs. We also asked if they were asked to provide care for a disabled child or a child with additional learning needs what factors would influence their ability or decision. 35 per cent stated they would not have any concerns. Of the majority of points raised in this area these can mainly be addressed by providing further support to the sector. This can either be financially, through equipment grants, or through further or specialised training showing that barriers can be broken with appropriate support. It can be seen that amount of care required by the child is a deciding factor for childminders specifically who, as often a lone worker in the setting, do have to consider the needs of other children using their service.

“Children currently in setting would need to come first and would need to ensure that I could still offer the same level of care to those children.”

“The possibility that the extent of care required for any individual child could impact ... on places available. This could impact against the financial viability of a setting where no additional funding is available [in relation to providing 1-2-1 care for a child]”

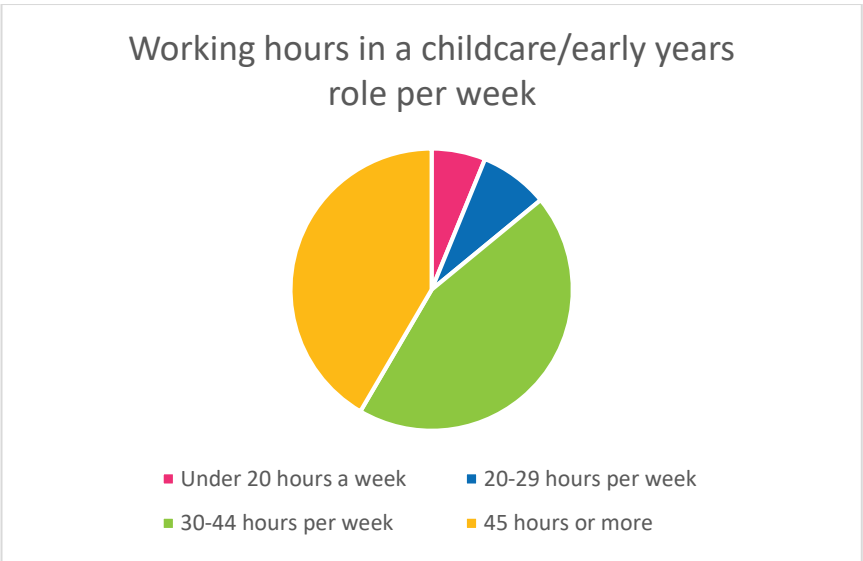
“As long as the training required was in place or available to access I'm happy to care for a disabled child, I would have concerns about behavioural issues related to additional learning needs as this could impact on other children in my care.”

Childminders also raised other points around access to their setting (as home based) potentially being a barrier to providing care to some children.



Working hours

Long hours are relatively common in the sector, with 42 per cent of respondents saying they worked 45 hours or more per week. This shows, given that the majority of respondents were childminders, that the hours worked reflect the need to meet the needs of working families and provide a flexible service.



Satisfaction

Regardless of the long hours, a clear finding is that nearly all (97 per cent) of respondents said that they find working in childcare and early years ‘rewarding’ or ‘very rewarding’.



When asked to comment on how rewarding the role was there was strong positivity around working with children and in the sector but more concerns raised around the ‘business’ side of the role.

One respondent captured the thoughts of many:

“I do find the actual contact time and activities with the children very rewarding but the reason I haven’t chosen ‘very rewarding’ overall is because I do not find all the paperwork, planning, evidence etc side of things rewarding and I do not feel the pay reflects the amount of work, effort and care that goes into being

a childminder. This is reflected as well in the general public's view of childminders, having had so many comments from people such as "do you plan to go back to work in the future?" "are you going to get a job again?" I don't think people understand that childminding is a very important, very full on job. I also feel that if I do have a career change in the future, that "childminder" on my CV will not be seen in a positive light by employers outside of the childcare profession, as I don't think it is viewed as a 'real' job by many who don't understand it. So it is very rewarding working with the children, seeing them grow and develop and achieve, working with (most of) the parents but looking at the bigger picture and thinking overall, there are things that are not rewarding about it."

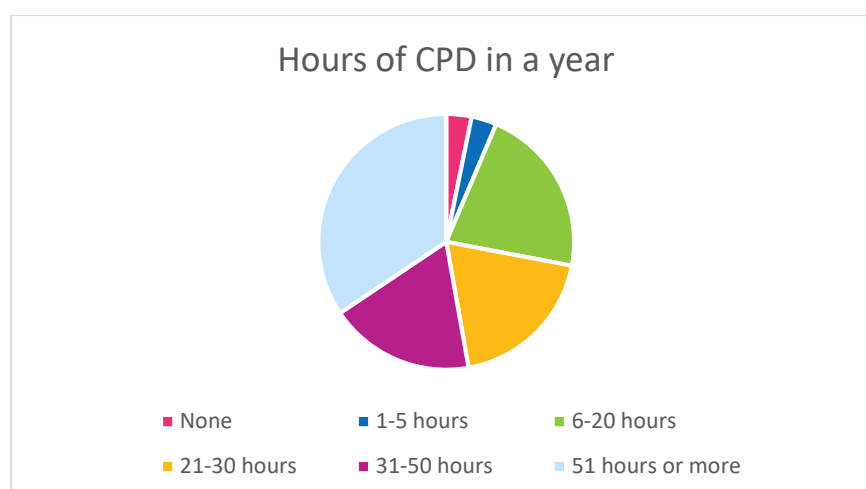
Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

This survey did not attempt to replicate information in relation to qualifications held by the sector given the previous work around this and 'survey overload' reported by many providers in relation to this area in recent years. Information in relation to qualifications can be found in other recent sector intelligence surveys including:

- Local Authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessment- available from individual Local Authorities in Wales
- [Cwlwm Childcare and Early Years Workforce Survey 16-17](#)

However the survey did ask questions of respondents linking to Continuous Professional Development (CPD). We asked how much CPD had personally been undertaken in the last 12 months. PACEY's definition of CPD is anything done to maintain and improve knowledge and skills, such as training; attending meetings and workshops; reading factsheets, practice guides, and magazines; and/or accessing peer support programmes.

Over half (56 per cent) of all respondents reported doing more than 20 hours of CPD per year. Less than three per cent reported doing none.



When asked what would incentivise people to do more CPD and select no more than three responses, the top response from all was that respondents felt they did not have the time to undertake CPD (46 per cent). Respondents also wanted more accessible CPD (35 per cent); more time to do CPD (39 per cent) and for CPD to be more affordable or subsidised (30 per cent). Just over a quarter also favoured converting CPD into higher qualifications over time, another quarter would like childcare cover during daytime courses and meetings and another quarter wanted more local options. Only six per cent said they were not interested in doing more CPD.

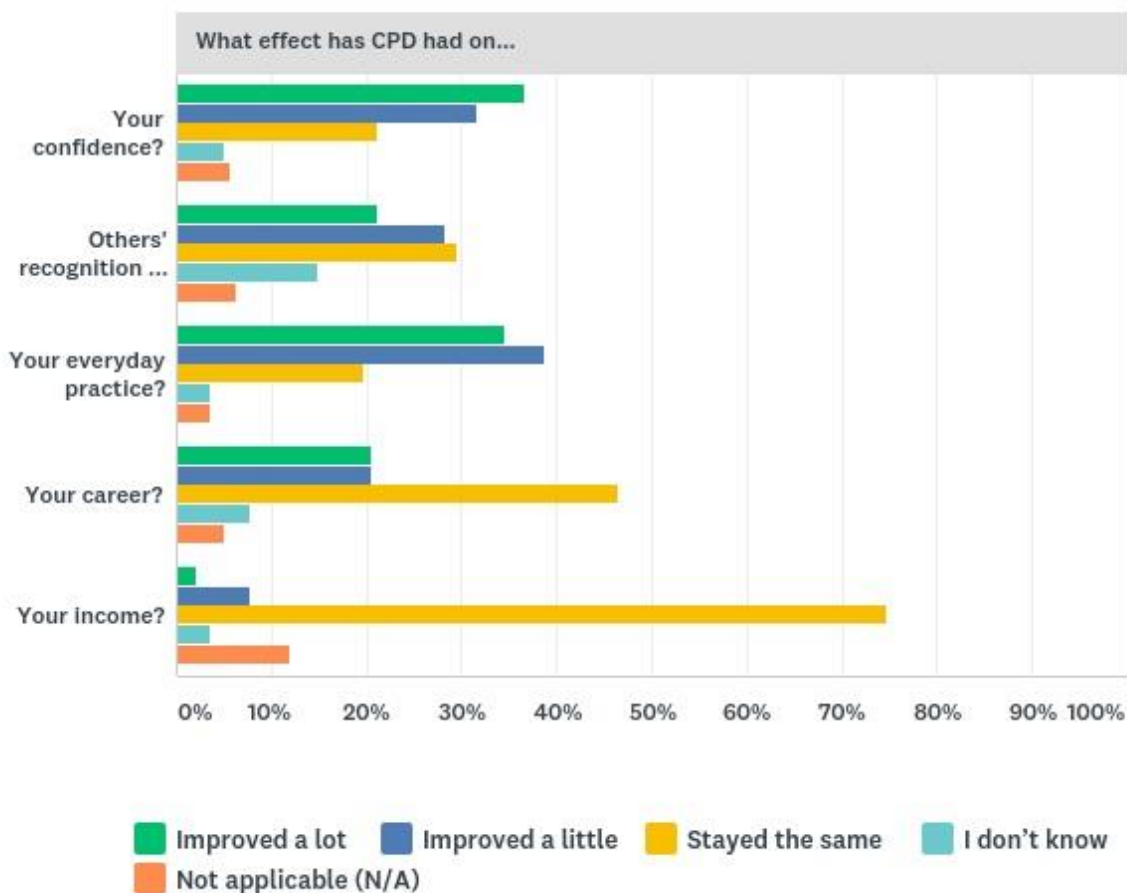
One respondent noted their frustrations:

“I'm doing as much CPD as I need to get the qualifications that are essential for me to continue childminding and reading to keep up with the constant changes to policies and procedures and requirements of CIW in order to get a good/outstanding inspection report. At my age I am not looking to do more compulsory training as it would probably result in me deciding to retire earlier than I would have otherwise done. Identifying if and what applies to Wales when hearing information on the news, which is usually about England but hasn't bothered to say so, often involves a lot of wasted time on the internet to find out.”

Impact of CPD

One of the most striking findings from the survey is the significant impact of early years CPD on everyday practice and confidence. Nearly three-quarters of respondents said that undertaking CPD improved their everyday practice, and nearly as many (67 per cent) said it improved their confidence.

Half of respondents also report that CPD improves others' recognition of their professionalism. 40 per cent also report an improvement in career. However, their impact is far less marked on income with only 10 per cent reporting that undertaking CPD improves income.



Early education and childcare entitlements

For the past decade, the Welsh Government increasingly subsidised the cost of early education and childcare. Currently three and four-year-olds are able to access part-time funded Foundation Phase education for children. The pilot of the Childcare Offer in Wales has also enabled working parents of three and four-year-olds to access up to 30 hours per week of funded childcare for 48 weeks of the year if they live in a pilot area. In addition to this two-year-olds living in Flying Start areas in Wales are entitled to 15 hours of childcare per week for 39 weeks of the year.

Delivery of existing entitlements

We asked childcare and early years professionals whether their setting currently offers funded places through a Welsh Government programme. Unsurprisingly, given our sector knowledge that opportunities for childminders to provide funded Foundation Phase, we found only 1 per cent of childminders claim to be offering this. 27 per cent of respondents stated they were offering Childcare offer places as part of the pilot and 13 per cent that they were offering Flying Start. The majority, 62 per cent have never offered or delivered funding places and this shows the support that may be required for the childminding sector specifically during the implementation of the Childcare Offer in Wales.

When asked the reasons for not delivering funded places the five key responses were that (please note up to three responses could be selected);

<i>My setting does not qualify to provide funded places</i>	32%
<i>My setting have not had sufficient demand for funded places</i>	15%
<i>There is too much paperwork/red tape</i>	12%
<i>The hourly rate is not enough</i>	11%
<i>Local authority payments are not regular and/or reliable</i>	7%

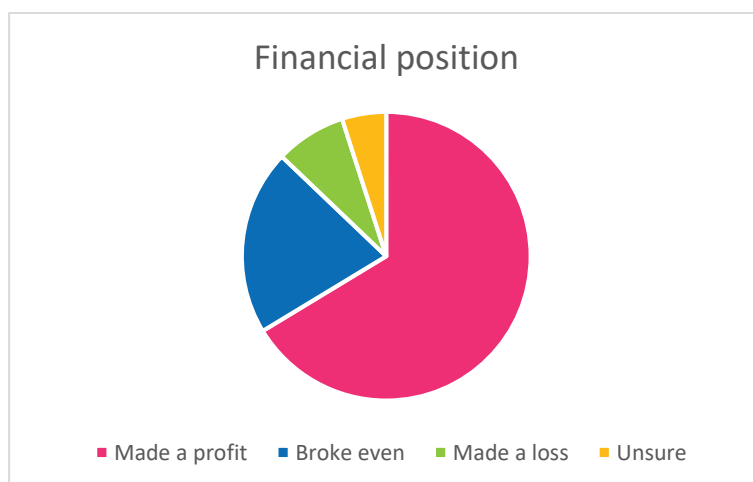
These findings show that change is needed to enable more opportunities for childminders to deliver funded services and look at the barriers for this in Wales.

Financial prospects and confidence

A core objective of the Building Blocks survey is to gauge the financial health of the sector and how confident people feel about the future. We asked childcare and early years professionals about how profitable their settings are, when they had last raised fees and whether they were likely to raise them in the future and how many unfilled places they had. We also asked about their financial prospects and future plans, which is particularly critical in view of the big changes the sector is facing in the coming months.

Profitability

In this year's survey 67 per cent of respondents, to whom the question was applicable, reported that their setting made a profit in the past 12 months. 21 per cent reporting breaking even, 8 per cent reporting a loss and 5 per cent unsure. It should be stated that our expertise of the sector shows that childminders rarely draw down a consistent salary from their business and so those who are reporting profit or unlikely to have taken any salary for themselves into account. The survey also showed a reported increase in the cost of running a childcare business with food costs and council tax increases being a particular concern.



Fees

The survey asked respondents when they had last raised their fees, and how likely it was that they would increase them in the coming year. 51 per cent to whom the question was relevant reported that their fees had risen in the past two years. More of a concern was the 29 per cent of settings who reported they had not increased their fees for over five years and potentially showing the financial strain the sector is facing.



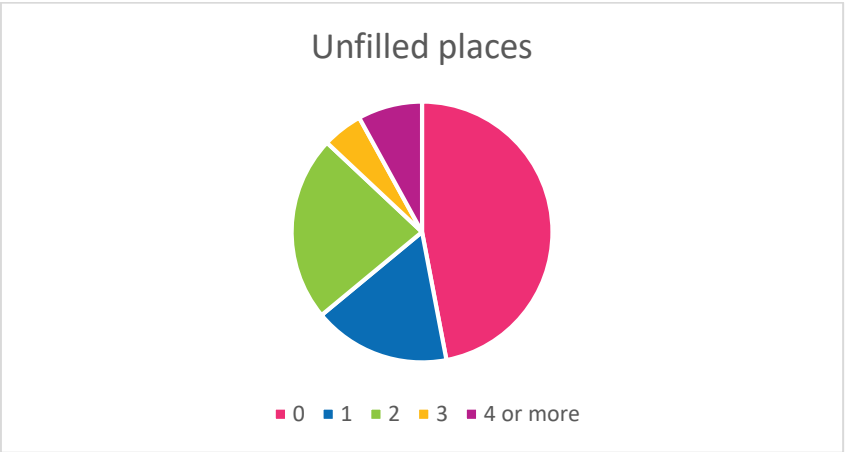
33 per cent of all respondents to whom the question was relevant reported that their setting was likely to raise their fees in the next 12 months with 59 per cent stating it was unlikely and 8 per cent being unsure.



Unfilled places

A majority (53 per cent) of respondents reported that they currently have at least one unfilled place that

they would like to fill with 47 per cent stating they were at capacity.



Financial confidence

We also wanted to know how confident people were about the financial prospects of their setting over the next year compared to the last 12 months. Just under three quarters (73 per cent) of those to whom the question was relevant are either more confident (30 per cent) or as confident (43 per cent) in the financial prospects of their setting. However the concern is around the 20 per cent who are less confident especially given the trend around childminder de-registrations in Wales as reported previously by PACEY Cymru. Financial stability was an issue that was also raised in this report.



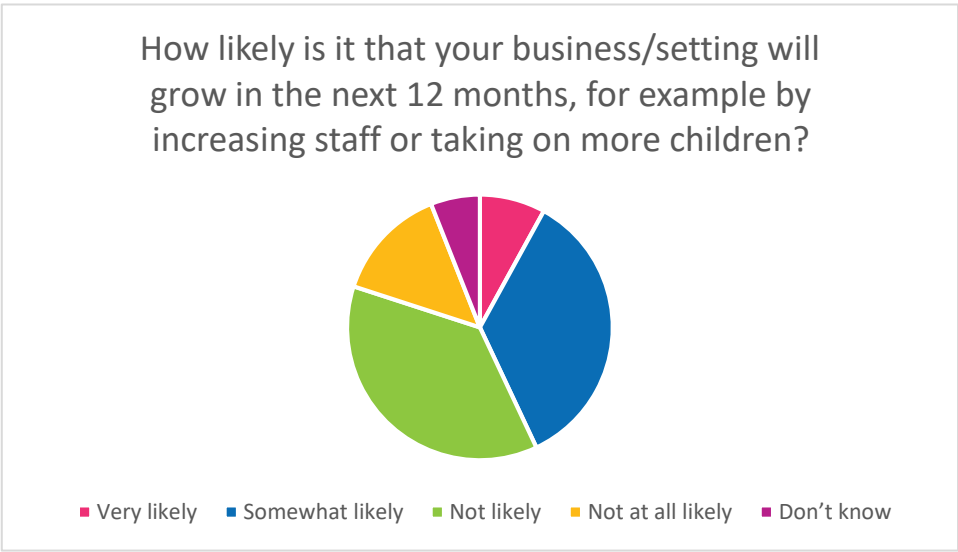
Business skills confidence

We asked if those responding ran their own childcare/early years business, how confident they felt in their core business knowledge and skills (e.g. marketing, managing budgets, accounting and finance, IT, employing and managing staff). The large majority (81 per cent) reported they were either very confident (24 per cent) or confident (57 per cent). The concern under this is the 19 per cent who stated they were not confident and what can be done to support these.



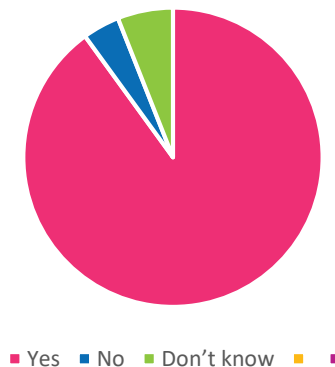
Future plans

When asked how likely it is that their setting will grow in the next 12 months, for example by increasing staff and/or taking on more children, just over half (52 per cent) said they had no plans to expand. However, over a third (35 per cent) said it was likely. How likely is it that your setting will grow in the next 12 months?



The vast majority (90 per cent) of respondents said they plan to still be working in childcare and early years in 12 months' time.

Do you plan to still be working in childcare/early years in 12 months' time?



When asked to speculate what, if anything, would cause them to leave the profession in the next year, the most common reasons cited are registration and inspection requirements (42 per cent), lack of demand for places/lack of work available (53 per cent), inadequate pay (30 per cent) and long hours (16 per cent). Again this does collate with the findings of PACEY Cymru's work around the reasons for de-registrations in Wales and are points to consider.

Conclusion

This report shows the issues facing respondents currently and provides an insight into the needs and concerns of childminders in Wales specifically. The coming months are set to be critical for the sector, as the Childcare Offer for Wales is rolled out further and eligible parents decide where they will take up their entitlement. Our survey found that confidence in future financial prospects is promising and that the majority of settings have at least a few unfilled places which could support the projected demand for the increase in places for the offer. The recent good news story in relation to related children in Wales shows that there are opportunities to influence change in Wales but that further work to ensure improved outcomes for the sector are still needed.

Recommendations

In light of our findings, PACEY Cymru will be looking to work closely with Welsh Government, CIW, Local Authorities, Cwlwm and other key partners in the following key areas:

Supporting sustainability

- To support business sustainability of childminders by ensuring opportunities to deliver funded programmes, including the Childcare Offer, Foundation Phase and Flying Start are accessible to childminders across Wales.
- To consider the implications on the wider childcare sector of strategic level decisions made

in the Local Authority- for example commissioning of services (including early years education) that may displace existing childcare places or disadvantage some forms of childcare providers from opportunities.

- To ensure consideration of the importance of parental choice in funding childcare and early years places especially in line with the development of the childcare offer to support sustainability of childminding provision.
- Continue to listen to the voice of the sector and the specific issues facing childminders around the development, implementation, delivery and evaluation of the Childcare Offer
- Ensure that guidance around related children in Wales is implemented and not continuing to impact on childminders.

Raising awareness of the services that childminders offer

- Ensure local authorities, children's centres and health visitors promote childminders as an option to parents seeking a funded place
- To further partnership working with Job Centre Plus and other identified partners to ensure childminding is seen as a positive career choice.
- In partnership with CIW and the wider sector to review the definition of a registered childminder. This includes consideration of a:
 1. clear position in relation to the maximum number of childminding assistants that can be employed in a childminding setting,
 2. clear, written requirement for employing an assistant and the definition of what is meant by 'working under supervision'
 3. clear position on how many registered childminders can work together from one setting under the definition of childminding.

These points can cause confusion and a clearer position would support business sustainability and consistent messaging as well as potentially providing development opportunities for some settings.

Raising professionalism and supporting quality improvement

- Ensure career and qualification pathways are fit for purpose for registered childminders and that there is consideration and appropriate focus given to registered childminders in strategic plans to support the continued professionalisation of the childminding role.
- Support CIW work on the publication of ratings for the childcare and play sector in Wales

from April 2019 and the publication of childminder reports. Evaluating any impact on improvement of childminding settings.

- Map support available for childminders around core business skills in order to support improvement and grow confidence.

Profile of respondents

A profile of respondents by Local Authority is available on request.

References

¹ Welsh Government, 2018 <https://gov.wales/newsroom/people-and-communities/2018/welsh-government-funded-childcare-offer-expanded/?lang=en> (Cardiff: Welsh Government)

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³ Qualifications Wales, 2017 <http://qualificationswales.org/english/qualifications/vocational-qualifications/vocational-qualifications-development/> (Newport: Qualifications Wales)

⁴ PACEY Cymru, 2018 <https://www.pacey.org.uk/news-and-views/news/latest-on-childminder-de-registrations-in-wales/> (Cardiff: PACEY Cymru)

⁵ PACEY Cymru, 2018 <https://www.pacey.org.uk/news-and-views/news/welsh-government-confirms-change-in-position-on-fu/> (Cardiff: PACEY Cymru)

⁶ Office for National Statistics, 2016 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsbyparentscharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2016> (London: Office for National Statistics)