Childminders in the UK

The impact of quality in early years education and comparisons of quality in different types of childcare and early years education.

The importance of quality

There is a general consensus amongst educators and researchers that the quality of the early years education that children receive is associated with their development and later learning outcomes, including their early language and cognitive development, well-being, school readiness and later academic outcomes in school (Eurydice, 2014). High quality childcare and education in the earliest years of children's lives can have a beneficial impact on their *'educational, cognitive, behaviours and social outcomes…in both the short and long term'* (Melhuish et al., 2017, p.8), year, page.) For example:

- The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Study found that higher quality provision was significantly associated with children's cognitive gains in pre-reading, early number concepts and non-verbal reasoning (Sammons et al., 2002).
- Numerous international studies have linked the quality of care children receive to their social development and behaviour, with children in high quality settings showing more compliance, cooperativeness and social competence, and better peer interactions (Melhuish et al., 2017).

Additionally, some recent research shows that the levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, increases throughout the day or remains elevated in children that attend full time day care, rather than declining as it typically should between morning and evening. This indicates that children in full time day care experience a stress response, a finding which has understandably concerned many working parents. However, the findings also show that this increase in cortisol is more likely in low quality settings, suggesting that high quality can offset the negative stress response that may be initiated due to being separated from parents.

Attachment theory also suggests that a stress response is initiated when a child is separated from a primary attachment figure (usually a parent) and 'senses danger' due to being in an unfamiliar environment. Importantly, this stress response can be avoided if babies or children have access instead to a 'secondary attachment figure': someone they know well and have a secure attachment to (Bowlby, 2007). Thus, it is suggested that children in day care can avoid a stress response to separation but they must form a secure attachment with an adult in their setting who they have consistent access to, to do so.

While the majority of children around the world *'attend child care centres of average or mediocre quality'*, England has a high proportion of good quality early years providers whereby over 85% of providers are judged good or outstanding. However, given the importance of quality in early years settings due to the impact on both developmental outcomes and stress responses, as outlined above, it is crucial that *all* children are able to attend a high-quality setting to unlock their potential.

Childminders in England

Childminders are an important part of the diverse early years child care and education provision in England. They provide flexible, wrap around care which is often vital to parents, especially those working longer or more unusual hours or in employment where shifts change week by week (Fauth et al., 2013). As they operate in a home-based environment they provide a different type of childcare to nurseries which is preferred by some parents, for example,

some mothers chose childminders because they perceived that it would provide a better 'substitute for mother' care than nurseries (Leach et al., 2009).

Childminders' experiences

- **Motivations:** An NCB (2011) survey of over 500 childminders found that for most childminders, the main motivation for becoming a childminder is the opportunity to work at home and take care of their own children. The desire to work with children is also a common motivation and enjoying have an impact on children is a common reason to remain in the profession (Fauth et al., 2011).
- **Ethos:** The same survey found that most childminder's ethos centred on tailoring provision to individual children and blending free play with a few directed activities. A caring relationship was afforded paramount importance by the childminders interviewed and surveyed.
- **Views of the EYFS:** childminders generally liked the EYFS as it professionalised their service and is useful to facilitate children's learning. However, they found it difficult to know if they were tracking children accurately, found some of the framework too complex and did not always feel they were able to share information about their children with local schools and nurseries due to negative perceptions from those other providers of childminders' ability. However, nearly a fifth felt that should they stop practising, the demands of the EYFS would be the reason why and 88% felt that the amount of paperwork was the biggest challenge with the EYFS.
- **Education and activities:** over 80% of childminders do counting activities, storytime and reading with children every day and around 80% do writing activities multiple times a week. Other activities such as arts and crafts, home based activities such as cooking, and, make believe play are also common.
- **Job satisfaction:** general job satisfaction is high though childminders are less satisfied with specific elements of their job including working hours, job security, earnings and the recognition they receive for their work.
- **Relationships with parents:** the vast majority of childminders felt that spending time and sharing information with parents was highly important. The main tensions in relationships with parents were parents' timekeeping and parents' late payments (44% and 45.3% had experiences issues with these things, respectively). 40.9% also felt parents 'take them for granted'.

The decline in childminders

There are approximately 40,000 childminders in England making them the most common type of provider, though due to their small scale they cater for fewer children than pre-schools and nurseries, providing around 19% of childcare places (see table 1).

Table 1: Number of providers and places provided by each type of setting.

	Number of providers	Number of places	% of total places provided
All providers	**65,800**	**1,334,600**	**-**
Childminders	40,800	253,900	19%
Nurseries and pre-schools	24,400	1,032,200	77%
Childcare on domestic premises	200	4,500	<1%
LA maintained nursery schools	400	44,000	3%

1. Nursery numbers rounded to nearest 100.
2. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding

However, the number of childminders has been in decline for the past two decades: in the mid-90s there were 100,000 childminders. The steep decline has gained particular attention in the past six years, in March 2018 there were 15,700 fewer childminders than in August 2012, a drop of 27%. Recent figures suggest this downtrend is still

ongoing: there were 600 fewer childminders in March 2018 than at the end of 2017, as the numbers leaving the profession outstripped those joining.

A study carried out by the Family and Childcare Trust to explore the reasons behind this dramatic drop highlighted three key factors:

- **A lack of flexibility:** many childminders felt that high levels of paperwork and regulation had significantly reduced the flexibility of the role, which for some had been a key driver in their decision to become a childminder.
- **Difficult interactions with Ofsted:** respondents felt that inspections and communications with Ofsted were primarily negative and left them feeling 'frustrated'.
- **A lack of support:** childminders again cited the administrative burden of the role and specifically felt that they needed more support. Crucially, this lack of support was linked to **reduced local authority funding** due to funding cuts.

Other issues mentioned in the above study, and by organisations working with childminders, include:

- a high administrative burden due to the EYFS framework,
- a lack of support with implementing the new 30 free hours childcare provision (as well as other funded entitlements for some 2, 3 and 4 year olds),
- low payment for funded hours,
- rising costs and other financial difficulties caused by contentious regulations such as childminders being prohibited from claiming funding for children they care for who are related to them.

However, this decline in numbers is set against a backdrop of improving standards. More childminders, and indeed early years providers in general, are rated good or outstanding than ever before. 93% of childminders are good or outstanding, a similar proportion to good or outstanding nurseries. However, child minders are less likely than nurseries to be graded outstanding (see figure 2).

Figure 1

Figure 1: Overall effectiveness of early years providers at their most recent inspection, 31 August 2017
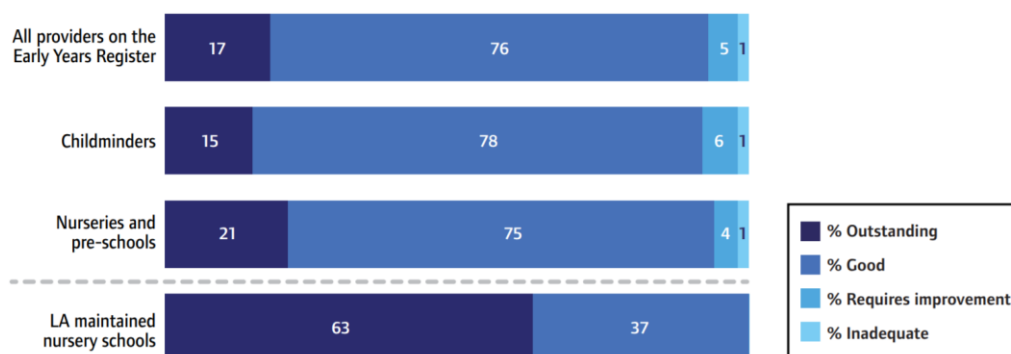
1. LA maintained nursery schools are inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.
2. Childcare on domestic premises are not included because only 148 providers had been inspected on 31 August 2017.
3. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.
Source: Ofsted

Worth saving?

Childminders provide a vital service for parents and carers with a flexibility that nurseries often cannot provide. They have a 'unique offer' (Fauth et al., 2011) as the only home-based childcare provider. A 2013 study found that parents felt childminders provided a 'family friendly' service in which flexibility was vital, especially for parents who might

need to swap days due to shift work (Fauth et al., 2013). Moreover, parents who choose childminders are more likely to want their choice of childcare to provide a 'substitute of mother' type of care which a home-base environment with fewer children and one or two adults is more likely to provide (Leach et al., 2009). Additionally, childminders are used as 'wrap around' care for many children over 5 as well as children in the early years. A 2013 report on parents' childcare needs found that nearly two thirds (62%) of working parents (or those seeking work) needed some form of wrap-around care (outside of school hours), most often after school. Of these, two thirds (67%) could find the care they needed, leaving one third unable to do so, suggesting a need for more availability or flexibility in the childcare market (Booth et al., 2013).

Childminders or nurseries: difference in choice and differences in quality

As discussed above, high quality childcare and early education has a positive impact on children's development and later outcomes. Indeed, the quality of the setting, rather than its type, is the most important determinant of how well children do, both in terms of their wellbeing and their development.

Factors influencing parental choice

Literature suggests that 'extrinsic factors' such as cost, location and ease of access 'dominate families' choices of childcare' (Peyton et al., 2001). Additionally, online parent forums reveal that when deciding which *type* of childcare and education to choose for their children, parents may weigh up advantages and disadvantages which are primarily focused on practical or logistical features, such as:

- cost,
- location,
- flexibility,
- how professional the setting is,
- the availability of sickness cover, or,
- the amount of peer to peer interaction the child will receive i.e. group size.

These forums reveal that parents may differently prioritise a setting such as a nursery because they perceive them to be more 'professional', or settings such a childminder, deemed to be more 'intimate' and 'family-like'.

The main, most common differences between childminders and nurseries, which are highlighted by parents, are outlined in table 1 along with details of how these factors feature in childminders and nurseries.

Table 2: Primary differences between nurseries and childminders considered by parents on online forums.

Day nurseries	Childminders
Larger group size: generally nurseries have more staff and therefore more children. They also have higher child-adult ratios see table 2 and table 3.	**Smaller group size:** often childminders work alone, though sometimes with an assistant, this, combined with lower child-adult ratios (see table 2 and table 3) mean childminders tend to have a smaller group of between 3 and 8 children in their setting.
Non home-based setting: nurseries are not home-based setting. This may mean they have more toys/resources, more space, more specialist equipment.	**Home based setting:** childminders care for children in their homes their home, whilst some may have a large amount of resources and/or specialist equipment, they are less likely to do so. However, the environment may more closely replicate that which children have at home and parents may perceive that this makes them feel more 'secure'/
Higher cost: nurseries tend to be more expensive with an average cost of 25 hours a week in nursery for under	**Lower cost:** childminders are slightly less expensive, costs vary widely by location and practitioner but on

twos at £124.73 and for over twos £120.66 (Childcare survey, 2018). (Nb, In London the cost is far higher and the difference in price between nurseries and childminders far greater).	average in England, 25 hours a week of childcare with a childminder costs £110.61 for under twos and £109.95 for over twos.
More professional systems: some parents viewed nurseries as more 'professional' in terms of their operations due to ease of payment systems.	**'Less professional systems':** childminders are less likely to have professional systems such as a website and online payment process. However, many childminders do use quick and simple methods of payment.
More reliability in relation to sick cover: given that nurseries have multiple staff, children will still be able to attend the setting when a staff member is ill.	**No sick cover:** in the case of most childminders the single person dependency means that parents may be left without care for their children if the childminder, or the childminder's children are ill.

Table 3: Adult: child ratios in nurseries and childminders

	Age of child(ren)					
Provider	**Under 1**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5 to 8**
Nurseries	1:3	1:3	1:4	1:8 or 1:13**		
Childminders*	1:1	1:3	1:3	1:3	1:3	1:6

*Registered childminders can look after up to six children up to the age of eight. Of these, a maximum of three can be under fives, who are classed as 'young children'. I.e. a childminder can look after 3 children under five, only one of which can be under 1, and 3 more children aged 5 to 8.
**Nursery ratios for children age 3 and over are 1:13 if a member of staff is level 6 qualified.

Parents who choose childminders

Parents who do choose childminders do so for the following reasons (many of which reflect the factors weigh up in discussions outlined in table 2) (Fauth, Owen and Jelicic, 2013):

- **'More family friendly':** parents perceive childminding as more family-friendly for working parents, citing flexibility including swapping days to fit in with shift work or inconsistent work schedules.
- **'More affordable':** parents perceived childminding as more affordable and complained of nurseries raising fees often and unexpectedly.
- **'Closer to home':** generally parents said that they could find a childminding closer to home whereas nurseries were far away.
- **'Group care inappropriate for young children':** parents that chose childminders viewed nurseries as 'inappropriate' for young children, citing a lack of safety, 'overly' strict practice and too much structure.
- **'The need for one-to-one':** parents that chose childminders view one-to-one attention as very important for their young children and felt this wouldn't be sufficient in a nursery setting. The consistent relationship with a single caregiver was viewed as highly important.
- **'A mix of groups and individual care':** parents who chose childminders felt that this childcare could provide a mixture of group interaction, at play groups and activities, and individual care in the childminder's home. Parents felt this provided a balance of stimulation and care.

Furthermore, another survey found that parents who chose childminders cited reasons such as 'trust' and the nature of care provided rather than educational reasons which were more commonly cited by parents who chose nurseries (Speight et al., 2009). Similarly, there is some evidence that in general, many mothers seek 'personal attributes' when choosing childcare, over practical and professional attributes, though it was unclear whether these mothers

were more likely to choose individual childcare providers such as childminders or nannies over group settings such as nurseries.

It is important to note that the above findings are not objective measures of quality or proof that childminders are better than nurseries, however, they do provide insight into why parents choose childminders and therefore the strengths of childminders.

Parental choice between nurseries and childminders: a question of quality?

Parents are likely to feel that the quality of care and education their child receives is of paramount importance when choosing an early years setting. However, it seems that quality is not a factor that is consistently mentioned when parents choose between *types* of setting: the considerations in table 2 are not determinants of quality (though some reasons cited by parents that choose childminders may relate to quality, see table 4).

Parents potentially do not mention quality specifically when comparing childminders and nurseries because the type of setting does not necessarily determine quality, i.e. there are high quality and low quality nurseries and high and low quality childminders. Though it is also clear that some factors unrelated to quality such as cost and location have a strong influence on parental choice highlighting that often parental choice is not a question of quality.

However, there are some factors which are determinants of quality and are associated, to an extent, with setting type, this is explored further in the following section.

Determinants of quality in childminder and nursery settings

Research comparing childminders to nurseries, or indeed examining childminding quality or practice itself, is scarce. However, by bringing together research on determinants of quality in early years settings in general, and trends in childminder and nursery settings, some comparisons are possible. Table 3 outlines some factors which influence the quality of settings and details how these factors operate in typical nursery and childminder settings. Clearly, there is considerable variation within types of settings on the basis of these factors and others that are not discussed here.

Table 4: Determinants of quality in early years provision and a comparison of childminders and nurseries in relation to these factors.

Determinants of quality in early years provision	Childminders	Nurseries
Qualified staff - research has demonstrated that more highly qualified staff are associated with better quality pedagogical environments in the early years, and consequently, better outcomes for children (OECD, 2011). Additionally, in environments with multiple adults, highly qualified individuals have a positive impact on the practice of less highly qualified colleagues, improving provision overall (Sammons, 2010).	Childminders registering now must have minimum qualifications including an Introduction to Childminding course certificate. However, those who registered years ago may not have minimum qualifications. In 2016, 17% of childminders had no early years qualifications (compared to 8% of other providers). 69% had at least a level 3 qualification. 11% had a level 5 or 6 qualification. 70% of childminders had a childcare related qualification (Fauth et al., 2011).	Staff in nurseries must have a level 2 qualification to count towards level 2 ratios, and a level 3 qualification to count towards level 3 ratios, thus, qualification rates tend to be higher. In 2016, only 6% of staff had no EY qualification. 77% had at least a level 3 qualification. 32% had a level 5 or 6 qualification. The finding that highly qualified staff improve the practice of other less qualified staff is more relevant in nurseries where there are more likely to be more staff.
Child-adult ratios – research has found that, in nurseries, when child:adult ratios increase, adults become less positive, more	Ratios for childminders are lower than for nurseries, if the findings apply to all settings, as well as nurseries, this	Ratios in nurseries are higher, however, this is in part linked to staff qualifications which in turn are linked to higher quality provision.

"Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood"

punitive, less emotionally responsive and more detached, suggesting that higher ratios may have an adverse effect on quality of education and care.	may suggest that these mandated lower ratios improve quality.	
Quality of caregiver relationship and interactions – nurturing and positive interactions are crucially important, as discussed in the previous section the need for children to form secure, positive bonds with their caregiver is vital for ensuring that separation from parents does not cause stress and anxiety.	Observational research found that childminders had more positive relationships and higher emotional responsiveness in comparisons to nursery staff, and lower scores on measures of detachment and punitiveness. This indicates that childminders have higher quality interactions and more positive relationships.	When researchers observed different types of care using measures of interpersonal interaction quality, nurseries were rated lower than other types of care on all measure of interpersonal interactions and were found to be more punitive.
Continuity of care – children who experience great 'caregiver stability' in early years settings have been found to show better relationships with caregivers and higher social competence. Furthermore, attachment theory emphasises the need for children to form a secure attachment with a secondary figure, consistently available to them, in order to avoid a stress response triggered by separation from parents.	In a childminder setting, there is greater continuity of care, therefore it is assumed that babies and children can more easily form a secure attachment to the single childminder who provides all their care. Some researchers suggest that because the childminder setting replicates a family setting more closely it better facilitates a long term secure attachment bond (Bowlby, 2007). However, this is of course dependent on the child remaining with the same childminder for a long time, if not for the entirety of their early education.	While the 'key worker' system, whereby individual nursery staff are assigned to specific children, helps develop relationships between children and staff, some researchers suggest that it is still more difficult for children to form a secure attachment in nursery settings, especially as children will likely interact with a number of different staff members and their key worker may not be consistently available (Bowlby, 2007). Additionally, staff turnover in nurseries is high: in 2016, turnover rates had increased to 18% (up from 14%) the previous year with higher turnover of more qualified staff.
Stimulating activities – stimulating activities support children's language and cognitive development as well as their wellbeing	Some research has found that the level of stimulating adult-child activities associated with language and reasoning development was higher in childminders' homes than in nurseries.	The same research also found that as children get older nurseries provide more activities that might promote cognitive development.
Safety – ensuring that children are in a safe environment is of paramount concern when considering the quality of a setting	A comparison of childminders, nurseries and relative-care found childminders to be significantly safer.	As mentioned, nurseries were found to be less safe than childminders.

As previously mentioned, research directly comparing childminders and nurseries is scarce. However, the Study of Early Education and Development (SEED), a longitudinal study which aims to explore how early education and care might be associated with cognitive and socio-emotional childhood outcomes has compared the outcomes of children attending different forms of early years provision. Its 2017 findings suggest that children attending nurseries and childminders differ in terms of some outcomes. These are outlined in table 4.

Where negative effects were found, these only occurred when children were in the childcare setting for more than 35 hours per week.

Table 5

Childminders -positive effects	Childminders - negative effects	Nurseries-positive effects	Nurseries - negative effects
Increased vocabulary/ verbal ability	Increased conduct problems	Fewer emotional symptoms	Increased conduct problems
Fewer emotional symptoms		Fewer peer problems	Lower emotional self-regulation
Better behavioural self-regulation		More prosocial behaviour	

Things tiney can say that are backed up by research:

Quality is important
- The quality of early years education and care that children receive has a huge impact on their later educational, behaviour, cognitive and social outcomes, as well as their wellbeing. OR
- High quality early years education and childcare has long term beneficial outcomes for children's educational and social success and their wellbeing.

What childminders can provide
- When young children are away from their parents in a childcare setting they need a consistent, caring figure to attach to (build a relationship with) in order to flourish. *(you can imply this is more likely in a childminder setting but you can't suggest that it can't happen in a nursery)*
- Some parents feel that childminders provide a type of care which is closer to that which a mother can provide
- Parents choose childminders because: they perceive them to be safer; they feel that young children need one-to-one attention; childminders can provider a mix of individual care and group interaction at play groups and other events.

The state of child minding in the UK
- Childminders are leaving the profession due to the level of paperwork, regulation and bureaucracy, financial difficulties (due to rising costs and low payment for funded hours) and a lack of support due to local authority cuts *(you can say this and frame it as tiney trying to address these issues to positively impact retention of childminders)*
- Most childminders are good but a smaller proportion of childminders are outstanding compared to nurseries *(you can say this and frame it as supporting childminders to become outstanding)*
- Only two thirds of parents are able to find the 'wrap around' care they need for their children suggesting that more flexibility and matching is needed in the childcare market.

Features of high quality early education and childcare and childminder-nursery comparisons
- Child-adult ratios are lower in childminders and lower child-adult ratios are associated with more positive interactions and more emotionally responsive care.
- Some observational research has found that that childminders have more positive relationships with children and are more emotional responsive than staff in nursery settings.
- Childminders provide more stimulating activities to promote language and reasoning development in young children than nurseries do *(be aware that nurseries provide more activities to support cognitive development of older children).*
- Childminders tend to be safer than other forms of childcare as measured by observational ratings of safety.
- Children that attend childminders benefit from increased vocabulary and verbal ability, fewer emotional symptoms and better behavioural self-regulation.