



An Roinn Leanai, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Workforce Development Plan Phase 2 Working Groups Report Training and Supports for Childminders Working Group

July 2021

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Context-WDP Phase 1 Progress Report	4
Progress in Phase 1	5
Phase 2- Training and Supports for Childminders.....	7
Working group membership	7
Terms of Reference	8
1: Role Profile of a Childminder	9
Rationale for Role Profile of a Childminder	12
2: Features of Foundation Training Programme for childminders	16
Rationale for Foundation Training Programme	18
Further consideration for the NAPC Advisory group on Training and Supports.....	22
3. Features of Quality Development Programme Training	24
Rationale for Quality Development Programme	26
Recommendations to the Steering Group	29
4. Other training.....	30
5. Other Supports	31
6. Options for the design and rollout of staffed local childminding networks, on the basis of research into effective childminder network models in other jurisdictions	32
Further consideration for the Advisory Group on Training and Supports	35
7. Role Profile of a Staffed Local Network Leader	36
Rationale for Role Profile of Staffed Local Network Leader	38
8. Features of Training Programme for SLN Leaders	41
Rationale for training programme for Staffed Local Network Leader	42
Recommendations for steering group	44
9: Timeline for the piloting and evaluation of the staffed local childminding networks.....	46
10. Further Action	48

Introduction

The Workforce Development Plan is being developed in close collaboration between the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Department of Education, and its development is overseen by a Steering Group and supported by a Stakeholder Group.

The Plan is being developed in two stages. Stage 1 involved high-level planning in relation to the composition of the workforce, including occupational roles and career pathways and consideration of means to promote retention and recruitment of the workforce.

Stage 2 involved the preparation of detailed policy proposals prepared by five working groups, for consideration by the Steering Group. These working groups are examining:

- Career Framework and Career Pathways
- Continuing Professional Development
- Promotion and Regulation of the Profession
- Qualifications and Training for School-Age Childcare
- Training and Supports for Childminders

The membership of each of the five working groups was drawn in the first instance from the Workforce Development Plan Steering and Stakeholder Groups, with additional expertise brought in where required, on the advice and recommendations of the Steering and Stakeholder Group.

Context-WDP Phase 1 Progress Report

First 5 contains a commitment to:

“Introduce a range of measures so that, by 2028: “All regulated childminders will hold a minimum qualification (level to be determined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs by end 2019 in follow-up to the Expert Group Report). An appropriate period of time will be provided to meet this requirement.”

There are estimated to be as many as 15,000 childminders in Ireland caring for children in the childminder’s home. Those caring for four or more pre-school children, or seven or more children of any age, in the childminder’s home must register with the Early Years Inspectorate of Tusla but fewer than 80 are currently registered. Other childminders who do not meet this threshold are not currently required to register with Tusla. Because of this, the majority of parents who avail of childminding services are not able to access public subsidies and many children are in unregulated settings that are not quality-assured.

The home and family setting in which childminders work differs in significant ways from centre-based provision. Although – like centre-based services – childminders are offering early learning and care and school-age childcare, their role profiles may therefore be different. At the same time, there are many similarities in roles.

It is important to set requirements that are achievable and that will encourage childminders to join a regulated sector rather than result in childminders leaving the sector or entering the informal economy, as both access to, and quality of, childminding services are in the best interests of children and families.

While current qualification levels among childminders are largely unknown, it is assumed that most childminders do not have specific early learning and care qualifications.¹ However, some childminders have related qualifications, e.g. individuals who previously worked in centre-based services.

Childminders work on their own as sole traders, with little support, no relief staff, and limited opportunity to engage in formal education or in training during the working day.

Both a 2018 Working Group report and the Draft Childminding Action Plan left open the question of what the minimum qualification requirement for childminders should be, given lack of agreement across the sector on the issue. The public consultation on the Draft Childminding Action Plan similarly indicated mixed views, with some calling for the same qualification requirement that centre-based practitioners face, while others said there should be no qualification requirement for childminders.

There are only 12 European countries in which there are training requirements for childminders; in other EU countries either childminding is unregulated or there are no training requirements. In 1/3 of European countries where childminding is regulated, there are no requirements related to training or qualifications. Where there are training requirements for childminders, these typically involve between 100 and 300 hours of initial training.

¹ According to QQI, fewer than 50 people per year complete the minor Level 5 award in childminding practice.

Progress in Phase 1

While work on developing a National Action Plan for Childminding has been under way for some years, the task of developing a recommendation on minimum qualification / training requirements for childminders was given to the Steering Group of the Workforce Development Plan, to ensure that any qualification requirement for childminders makes sense in the context of proposals for qualifications and training for centre-based practitioners.

The Workforce Development Plan Steering Group examined the issue of training / qualification requirements for childminders and took into account the views set out in the 2018 Working Group report and the Draft Childminding Action Plan, as well as the recommendations of the Workforce Development Plan Stakeholder Group and a focus group of childminders specially convened for a meeting of the Workforce Development Plan Steering Group.

Introducing foundation level training as a condition of registration with Tusla was seen as important to ensure a child-centred approach to quality and to ensure accountability for public funding (e.g. the National Childcare Scheme), while an incremental approach is warranted to ensure that childminders are supported to engage in quality development and are not driven out of the sector in the short term.

The Workforce Development Plan Steering Group recommended a balanced approach, reflecting both the opportunity created by the National Childcare Scheme to incentivise childminders to register with Tusla and the need for a phased, supportive approach that encourages and supports childminders to remain working in the sector. The Workforce Development Plan Steering Group proposed the introduction of a minimum training requirement for childminders to register with Tusla but proposed that the requirement should be less onerous than the full Level 5 NFQ requirement for centre-based practitioners and should be introduced over time. The Workforce Development Plan Steering Group recommended an initial pre-registration requirement of completing a foundation training course, with the full qualification/training requirement to be met over a period of years following registration.

This approach has now been reflected in the National Action Plan for Childminding, which was published in April 2021.

In advance of establishing a training programme for childminders, an initial action will be to identify a role profile (or role profiles) for a childminder, to form the basis for development of training programmes. This work will be carried out during Phase 2 of the Workforce Development Plan and Phase 1 of the National Action Plan for Childminding.

On the basis of this role profile(s), a Foundation Training Programme will be developed, with a view to completion of this foundation training programme being a pre-requirement for registration with Tusla. This will be specific to childminders.

A Quality Development Programme that is specific to childminding will also be developed. This training programme will offer childminders a supported pathway to quality development and

recognition of their skills and experience. Tusla-registered childminders will be required to complete this Quality Development Programme over a period of years. In order to remain registered, a childminder will be supported to demonstrate progression through the training and mentoring programme. The Quality Development Programme will result in a special purpose award at Level 5 on the NFQ, significantly smaller in scale than a major Level 5 award.

Participation in the Quality Development Programme will be supported through the development and progressive rollout of staffed local childminding networks across the country, which will provide local support for childminders.

Every effort will be made by DCEDIY to cover a significant amount of training costs or course fees. Training will be delivered in formats that are suited to childminders, e.g. evenings and weekends, remote and face-to-face. Recognition of prior learning will be built into the assessment of both the Foundation and Quality Development training programmes. Assessment will be competency-based and will involve a strong emphasis on portfolios.

While training will be developed for the purpose of supporting childminders working in a home environment, it will be modular and structured in such a way as also to facilitate a two-way transferability of training between centre-based provision and home-based provision.

Phase 2- Training and Supports for Childminders

The Training and Supports for Childminders working group held its first meeting on 12th February 2021 to develop proposals for consideration by the WDP Steering Group. The working group has developed these recommendations on the basis of the content of the National Action Plan for Childminding (NAPC, 2021-2028). The working group wishes to highlight that childminders should be recognised for the important role they play in the provision of care for children and are an integral part of the ELC/SAC sector. The group emphasises the importance of encouraging childminders to join a regulated sector rather than resulting in childminders leaving the sector.

The group felt it is important to highlight that the recommendations in relation to the role profiles, features of the Foundation Training Programme and the QDP are being made in the absence of the proposed childminding specific regulations that will be developed during the implementation of the NAPC. A review of the role profiles and the features of both training programmes may be required when childminding specific regulations are in place.

Working group membership

Chair	McCarthy, Karen	DCEDIY
Rapporteur	McKenna, Sarah	Childminding Development Officer
Admin	Scully, James	DCEDIY

Group Member	Organisation
Brummell, Aine	Childcare Committees Ireland
Byrne, Sharon	Barnardos
Cronin, Ide	Tusla
Downey, Clare	National Parents Council
Ferry, Liz	Childminder
Hyman, Hazel*	Childminder
Kelleher, Fiona	Early Childhood Ireland
McColl, Heather	Childminding Development Officer
McGovern, Martina	Better Start
Orbinski Burke, Bernadette*	Childminding Ireland

* Childminding Ireland requested that the following statement be inserted in the report in relation to their membership of this working group:

“As a result of its deep concerns about the process and the draft recommendations being produced, the Board of Childminding Ireland, the national body for childminding, decided to withdraw the organisation from the Workforce Development Planning Childminding Group (WDP Childminding Group). The Board believed the process did not reflect the reality of childminders experiences. This was a logical consequence of a process that was flawed in terms of composition.

The Board of Childminding Ireland believe it is vitally important that childminders and parents using childminders services are engaged as policies and actions are developed, rather than being the

recipients of decisions that are taken without their effective and meaningful input. The Board recognised the need for the relevant statutory partners to be involved in the deliberative processes, but are committed to the fundamental importance that the engagement with childminders and service users is direct, authentic and at the centre of key discussions and decisions. There is a real danger that recommendations for childminding would be created through the prism of a centre-based view. It is inappropriate for those not proximate to childminding to be making recommendations for an entire workforce.

Childminding Ireland the only representative body for childminding, could not endorse the suggested recommendations nor the process, and were left with no option but to withdraw from the WDP process.

It should also be noted that 1 of the 2 childminders on the WDP Childminding Group (both Tusla Registered) also withdrew from the process as she did not feel the process was appropriate.

After much communication and discussion with the Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the acknowledgement of subsequent positive steps the DCEDIY has taken, in particular with developing the Expression of Interest questionnaire, Childminding Ireland will take up its seat on the National Action Plan for Childminding Steering Group.”

Terms of Reference

To develop proposals for consideration by the WDP Steering Group – including rationale, approach to implementation (given the current childminding context), timelines for reform, initial actions and (where relevant) financial implications and trade-offs – on training and supports for childminders, in line with the approach agreed by the WDP Steering Group during Stage 1 of the WDP and with the Childminding Action Plan (forthcoming).

Proposals should include:

- A role profile (or role profiles) for a childminder, to form the basis for development of training programmes for quality childminding.
- Features of a Foundation Training Programme for childminders, including its delivery format and rollout.
- Features (including recognition of prior learning, competency-based assessment, and a strong emphasis on portfolios) of a modular Quality Development Programme for childminders who have completed the Foundation Training Programme, including its delivery format and rollout.
- Other training that may be needed by childminders, e.g. first aid and child safeguarding training.
- Other supports that may be needed to help childminders undertake and complete the proposed training programmes.
- Options for the design and rollout of staffed local childminding networks, on the basis of research into effective childminder network models in other jurisdictions.
- A role profile for the leader of a local childminding network, and features of a training programme for leaders of local childminding networks.
- A timeline for the piloting and evaluation of staffed local childminding networks.

Key activities to inform the Working Group’s proposals should include:

- Mapping of training and supports currently or recently available for childminders in Ireland.

1: Role Profile of a Childminder

What is a childminder?

A childminder cares for an individual or small group of children in the childminder's own home. Childminders offer a flexible and reliable service that is tailored to each child, thereby helping parents to balance their work and family commitments. The child's welfare must be the prime consideration of the childminder as they have sole responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of each child while entrusted to their care.

Section 1: Key tasks and Responsibilities

The national frameworks, ²Aistear and ³Síolta, support childminders to deliver high quality care to children.

It is a childminder's responsibility to:

- Create a home from home environment and ensure all children are welcome, safe and have a sense of belonging
- Work singlehandedly, being responsible for the children in their care
- Ensure the childminding service, in partnership with all children is child centred.
- Ensure clear, effective and respectful communication with all children, parents and relevant organisations
- Recognise potential challenges to communication with children and/or their parents and develop strategies to overcome these
- Have knowledge of relevant national policy, ensuring and maintaining compliance with all relevant legislation and regulatory requirements

² Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009) describes the types of learning that are important for children in their early years and is designed for use in a number of different early years' settings, including childminding services.

³ Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (2006) is designed to define, assess and support the improvement of quality across all aspects of practice in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) settings where children aged birth to six years are present, including childminding services.

- Engage in continuous professional development opportunities to maintain and develop knowledge and skills
- Know where to find appropriate support, training, advice and information and access when needed
- Develop and implement appropriate policies and procedures
- Ensure incidents and accidents are managed in an appropriate way
- Maintain all appropriate records relating to childminding
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of the children and their families at all times

Section 2: Child Development

Childminders need a knowledge and understanding of the developmental stages of all children in their care.

It is important that childminders:

- Welcome, respect and value each child's individual characteristics, dispositions, personalities, interests, rights, choices and needs
- Develop and build supportive and trusting relationships with all children in their care and their families through meaningful interactions
- Support and acknowledge children's achievements, abilities and learning
- Through a process of observation, reflection, planning and reviewing, foster and encourage children's holistic development, whilst being aware of and sensitive to the developmental needs of all children
- Recognise the value of younger and older children playing together whilst providing interesting, varied and engaging opportunities for children to play individually and/or as part of a group

Section 3: Life Learning and Learning through Play

A childminder will create homely, nurturing and inclusive environments both indoors and outdoors. These high-quality stimulating environments need to provide a broad range of appropriate experiences to promote children's holistic learning. The national frameworks, Aistear and Síolta, support childminders to deliver high quality care to children⁴.

It is important that childminders:

- Through observation provide, implement and evaluate age and stage appropriate experiences that engage the children and promote positive outcomes
- Provide time, space and resources for a range of child-led experiences in the home which supports unscripted and open ended play opportunities for all the children
- Use the outdoor environment to foster a love of nature and support children's positive experiences of the natural world for younger children as well as environmental awareness for older children
- Encourage the use of everyday routines and materials in the home, as resources for exploration and play, giving children the freedom to be creative, imaginative, make decisions and problem solve
- Involve the children in the day-to-day experiences of the home

Section 4. Health & Wellbeing

Childminding provides a safe and stimulating environment that promotes each child's health, development and emotional well-being whilst offering children healthy activities and good nutrition. Hygiene, safety, adequate rest and comfort are all vitally important to keep children healthy and well.

It is important that childminders:

- Develop and implement good working practices to ensure a safe, healthy, hygienic, caring, comfortable and nurturing environment
- Foster and encourage resilience, wellbeing, health and safety of all children
- Are able to competently perform Paediatric First Aid procedures when caring for an ill child and/or in an emergency
- Have knowledge of children's nutritional needs, plan and prepare a healthy, well balanced diet which respects the children's and families individual needs, choices and cultures
- Develop and implement a Child Protection policy and procedure, which includes obtaining Garda vetting and a child safeguarding statement, that ensures the protection of all children in their care is prioritised

Section 5: Relationships with families and engaging with the local community

Childminders foster positive and trusting relationships with all families of children in their care and engage positively within their local community.

Relationships with families:

It is important that childminders:

- Recognise and respect parents as the primary carers and educators of the children in their care
- Develop positive relationships with families
- Ensure each child and their family is supported and their rights are respected
- Support the needs of individual children when transitioning to and from the childminding home
- Collaborate and communicate with relevant agencies when appropriate and always with the consent of parents to ensure children and their families receive required services
- Promote parental involvement and ensure that parents are kept informed of children's daily experiences
- Work with families to ensure that, as far as possible, there is consistency and continuity of approach to routines such as sleep and toilet training and to approaches in relation to supporting children with their behaviour
- Recognise and support individual family characteristics and different ways of parenting by providing an inclusive environment, where equality and diversity are respected

Engaging with the local community:

It is important that childminders:

- Provide for experiences that relate to and reflect children's daily lives with their family and community
- Create a sense of belonging within the local community
- Engage within the local community to expand the life learning experiences provided for children
- Provide opportunities for children to engage in and experience activities in the local community

Please note parent has the same meaning as those with parental responsibility

Rationale for Role Profile of a Childminder

The working group members have developed and agreed on a role profile of a childminder. A subgroup on the role profile held 3 meetings outside of the main working group meetings. Various discussions took place between the subgroup members and through these discussions, a role profile was developed taking into consideration the feedback from all of the subgroup members, the role profile was presented to the main working group. Further discussions and feedback was incorporated and a role profile was agreed by the group for consideration by the WDP Steering group.

The role of a childminder is a complex, diverse, multidimensional one and to ensure the best outcomes for children and their families the role profile must reflect this. Research has shown that quality early childhood practice is built upon the unique role of the adult. The competencies, qualifications, dispositions and experience of adults, in addition to their capacity to reflect upon their role, are essential in supporting and ensuring quality experiences for each child (Sjolta, 2006).

The working group recognised that childminding and the role of the childminder is distinctive and provides a different experience and environment for children compared to centre-based care. The working group also recognised that childminders work singlehandedly, without the support of a team approach to care and this is reflected within the role profile.

In order to capture all of the elements of childminding and the skills, knowledge and competencies to carry out the role the working group have divided the profile into 5 sections: Key Tasks and Responsibilities, Child Development, Life learning and Learning through Play, Health and Wellbeing and Working with families and within the community.

Key Tasks and Responsibilities

Childminders have a number of key tasks and responsibilities when caring for children. The role profile must reflect the onus on the childminder to provide a safe, secure, stimulating home from home environment for the children in their care, where children's rights and their wellbeing and holistic

development are central. Working in partnership with parents to provide an environment in which all children are happy, feel they belong and can develop to their fullest potential is a hallmark of quality practice (Aistear, 2009)

The working group stressed the importance of relationships and interactions. Developing positive relationships with parents and children through effective communication is fundamental to ensure best outcomes for children.

Child Development

Childminders are in a unique position and care for children from very young babies to older children in mixed age groups therefore the working group believes that an understanding of development for all ages and stages of childhood is important.

To ensure children reach their full potential as unique individuals, childminders must have an understanding of children's individual needs, recognise and acknowledge the different stages of their development.

Childminders must understand the benefits of caring for mixed age groups including supporting older children to, model, scaffold and relate positively to younger children.

Life Learning and Learning through Play

The working group members recognised and discussed the importance of play and children's right to play. Childminders should provide children with the opportunities to play in stimulating environments both indoors and outdoors.

The working group stressed the importance of providing an environment that would promote play for children of all ages and stages of development within the childminders home. Síolta describes play as an important medium through which the child interacts with, explores and makes sense of the world around them. These interactions with other children, adults, materials, events and ideas, are key to the child's well-being, development and learning.

Life learning was also discussed at the working group with members stressing the variety of experiences children enjoy in a childminding setting and how they build lifelong skills such as cooking or gardening. Aistear outlines the role of the adult (childminder) in supporting children to become active learners, encourage positive attitudes towards learning and develop dispositions like curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, resourcefulness and risk taking.

Health & Wellbeing

The working group discussed the important role the childminder plays in providing a safe and stimulating environment that promotes each child's health, development and emotional well-being whilst offering children healthy, positive experiences and good nutrition. The role profile outlines the practices childminders should implement to ensure the health and wellbeing of each child while in their care and ensure children reach their full potential.

The working group believes that the childminder should have a good knowledge of children's nutritional needs and provide a balanced diet for the children in their care. A nutritious balanced diet is essential, especially during childhood, as it is a time of rapid growth, development and activity.

The working group stressed the importance of safeguarding children and included the need for childminders to develop and implement a child protection policy and procedure, obtain Garda vetting and also to develop a child safeguarding statement. Childminders have a duty of care to ensure they make every possible effort to protect the children in their care.

Working with families and within the local community

The working group discussed the importance of building positive relationships between the childminder, the child, their family and the local community. The role profile sets out some ways in which a childminder can achieve this.

The working group discussed the benefits for children, parents, and the childminder when the childminder engages with the local community in their daily activities. Establishing links with the local community can promote children's citizenship. Providing children with opportunities to be involved with the local community and have it become integral to their lives has the possibility to empower children with a sense of identity and belonging.

Aistear and Síolta:

The working group members believe that childminders should have a general knowledge and understanding of the national frameworks Aistear and Síolta. One of the childminders on the working group described how she implemented both frameworks into her everyday activities with the children. Working group members believe that many childminders are delivering high quality practice and whilst many may be unaware of both frameworks, they will be able to recognise the links between their everyday practice and the principles of Aistear and Síolta.

2: Features of Foundation Training Programme for childminders

Features	Delivery	Platforms/ Support	Duration	Evidence of Learning	Incentives
<p>Linked to the Role Profile:</p> <p>Key tasks & responsibilities (including business side)</p> <p>Child Development (Mixed Age groups)</p> <p>Life Learning and Learning through Play</p> <p>Health & Well-being (include First Aid)</p> <p>Relationships with families</p> <p>Engaging with the local community</p>	<p>Blended approach – both face to face as well as online</p> <p>Optional face to face sessions with dates/ venues decided in advance</p> <p>One induction day face to face/ live webinar including discussion on evidence of best practice</p> <p>Online forum for extra support/ weekly check ins with Tutor</p> <p>Local delivery</p> <p>Network event mid-way through (include stakeholder support)</p> <p>Blended approach to Peer Training Support Networks</p>	<p>Online lessons – pre-recorded, voice over, auto-script</p> <p>Learning Management System (LMS), also available in a mobile app</p> <p>Local Support via CMDOS/ NVCOs/ CCCs</p> <p>IT support e.g. Device set up, training, support accessing and navigating the LMS</p>	<p>Minimum 15 hours to complete (consideration needed for external training required e.g. PHECC & Children First)</p> <p>3 months to complete Foundation Training Programme with regular check ins from Tutor</p> <p>To be reviewed following pilot.</p>	<p>Reflective Practice</p> <p>Photo evidence/ short statements (template available for CMs to use/ video recordings)</p> <p>Use app to upload evidence</p> <p>Show prior learning linked to unit areas</p> <p>Show day to day activities linked to unit areas</p> <p>If a new CM – how they will implement Foundation Training learning in their future practice</p> <p>Must submit valid Children First E-Learning (complete via Tusla)</p>	<p>Fully funded to complete FT prior to new regulations</p> <p>Once FT is completed, Funding available for CMs to complete separate PHECC (FAR) training</p> <p>Consult with Revenue about extending Childcare Services Relief Tax to CMs who have completed FT (eligible for state funding)</p> <p>Access to funding programmes (e.g. NCS)</p> <p>Learner Fund</p> <p>CMDG criteria updated to include completion of FTP</p> <p>Specific start-up/ operational grant linked to</p>

				<p>Certificate of completion issued</p> <p>Some similarities with QDP, elements may already be completed in FTP</p>	<p>quality for those who have completed FTP</p> <p>Technology support grant – funding to purchase a compatible device</p> <p>Graduation ceremony</p>
--	--	--	--	---	--

Rationale for Foundation Training Programme

Introduction

The working group members have agreed on the features of the Foundation Training Programme for childminders. A subgroup on the features of training held 6 meetings outside of the main working group and had many discussions on all elements of the Foundation Training Programme and the Quality Development Programme (QDP). The subgroup presented the features to the main working group who agreed. The group emphasised the importance of ensuring the Foundation Training Programme is achievable for all childminders to complete in order to register with Tusla under the new childminding specific regulations. The working group recognises the broad range of skills, knowledge and competencies of childminders nationally, ranging from those who have completed accredited training and those who possibly, for the first time will be embarking on training. The working group stressed the importance of retaining existing childminders as they play a key role in the provision of ELC and SAC in Ireland. Therefore, the working group recommends that the Foundation Training Programme is a stand-alone training programme which is not accredited however, the training programme should be recognised as part of prior learning for the QDP. The Foundation Training programme should only be delivered by approved training providers, this will ensure consistent standardised delivery. Childminders will have to submit evidence of learning which is not graded and on completion will receive a certificate. The QDP will build upon the Foundation Training Programme to include more detail and more training.

Features

The working group discussed the features of the Foundation Training Programme, discussions took place in relation to the terminology – modules, areas, units. The working group agreed that the Foundation Training Programme should be divided into units and felt that a modular approach may be daunting for the participants. This should be linked to areas within the role profile of a childminder (pg 9). The working group were reluctant to specify the number of units and believed the areas of the role profile should be weighted in importance and this would be decided by the NAPC Advisory group on Training and Supports. However, the group felt very strongly that the relationships with children and partnerships with parents is a very important element and should be weighted accordingly.

The working group discussed First Aid training and agreed that this will link to the requirements under the new childminding specific regulations, members believed that providing necessary information within the Health and Wellbeing unit is sufficient. An introduction to Paediatric First Aid is recommended to be included in the Foundation Training Programme. The full Paediatric First Aid is not recommended as a feature of the Foundation training Programme at this point for a number of reasons - if a full paediatric first aid course was included this would result in a considerable increase in hours to the Foundation Training Programme (15 hours recommended); the cost implications to complete the full award; and the current PHECC requirement for Tusla registration which may remain for the new childminding specific regulations. If PHECC training was to be included as part of the Foundation Training Programme, it would result in a considerable increase in hours to the training course, so the working group suggests once the Foundation Training Programme is completed, there is funding available for childminders to complete a separate PHECC (FAR) training required for

registration under the new regulations. The group are conscious of childminders completing the PHECC training too far in advance of the new regulations as certificates are valid for 3 years.

The working group held discussions on the content of each unit and recognised that the work of this group was to identify the features of the Foundation Training Programme and the NAPC Advisory group on Training and Supports will recommend the specific content, however the group did discuss the importance of Diversity, Equality and Inclusion training for childminders. Consideration will also be needed to support childminders where English is not their first language to ensure all childminders have equal opportunities to complete the training. An inclusive environment, where equality is upheld and diversity respected, is fundamental to supporting children to build positive identities, develop a sense of belonging and realise their full potential (Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter, 2016). Childminders have the opportunity to provide an inclusive environment and the working group recommend that this could be included within a module in the QDP and in the interim the City and County Childcare Committees should offer places for childminders on the DEI training they currently deliver to ELC and SAC service.

Delivery

The working group discussed the various methods of delivery of the Foundation Training Programme. The group acknowledged that childminders would have different preferences for completing the programme. A blended approach with majority online delivery was agreed. The working group recommends the online course will be delivered asynchronously, therefore accommodating face to face options if required. The group recognises the benefits and challenges of both face-to-face training and online training including the availability of appropriate devices, good internet access and travel implications. The group discussed ensuring the delivery of the Foundation Training Programme would be accessible to participants with a variety of learning styles. The role of the tutor will be paramount for successful delivery of the programme and the working group identified the necessity for the tutor to monitor the online platform and to arrange regular support forums via face to face and live webinars.

The working group recognised the importance of accessibility to face to face sessions. Childminders work long hours and therefore the classes should take place in the evenings or on Saturdays. The working group acknowledges that the location of the face-to-face sessions will be crucial to ensure all childminders can participate. The group recommends that childminders should have the choice to attend a session that is most convenient to them and not confined by county boundaries. The working group continuously stressed the importance of ensuring the Foundation Training Programme is as easily accessible to all childminders to maximise participation.

The group recommends an induction day for all childminders at the beginning of the programme to introduce them to the online platform, the programme content, assessment process, optional face to face sessions (date laid out in advance) and various support methods (weekly check in sessions, peer support sessions).

Consideration is needed to decide if a train the trainer programme will be required when the Foundation Training Programme is being developed.

Platform/Support

The working group discussed a number of different platforms for the Foundation Training Programme and recommends the Learning Management System LMS365. The LMS365 is fully integrated with the entire Microsoft 365 stack from PowerPoint, SharePoint, Word, Excel and Teams. The LMS365 is compatible to a laptop, desktop, mobile phone or tablet, therefore learners are empowered to learn using existing and familiar systems. Ann Lane from BetterStart delivered a PowerPoint presentation to the working group describing the features and content of the LMS365 the organisation has been using to deliver their training. Ann described how effective the system was and how developing content for the training programme was a relatively easy process. The working group agreed that the majority of childminders would have some knowledge of Microsoft and therefore agreed it was the optimum platform.

The working group also discussed the importance of support throughout the learning process in relation to accessing and navigating the platform and highlighted for some learners the importance of accessing printed resources on topics relevant to the training.

Duration

The working group aligned the duration of the Foundation Training Programme to previous non accredited training programmes to ensure it is accessible to all childminders and not an onerous task, the working group recommends a minimum 15 hours of training.

The working group also identified the need to consider external training including Children First E-learning programme and First Aid. The working group recommends a period of 3 months to complete the Foundation Training Programme and stressed the importance of regular support from the tutor to identify the participants that require additional support to complete. The group discussed that some participants may require a deadline to help motivate them and increase focus to complete the programme.

The working group recommends a review of the duration of the Foundation Training Programme following the pilot stage to ensure the time frame is appropriate.

Evidence of Learning

The working group discussed several options for the participants to demonstrate their learning.

‘Recognition of prior learning will be built into the assessment of both the Foundation Training Programme and the Quality Development Programmes. Assessment will be competency-based and will involve a strong emphasis on portfolios’ (NAPC, 2021).

The working group discussed the terminology in relation to the assessment process and agreed the term ‘portfolio’ may create anxiety among some participants and recommend the term ‘Evidence of learning’ for the assessment process. The working group suggests this may take the form of the following: reflective practice, photo evidence/ short statements (template available for CMs to use)/ video recordings.

The group highlighted the importance of enabling participants who are embarking on a childminding career to complete the assessment process and are supported by the tutor to demonstrate how they will implement the learning from the Foundation Training Programme in their childminding practice. The assessment process should be linked to the learning outcomes of each unit within the programme.

Child Safeguarding is fundamental to all practices in relation to childcare provision and this will be included in the Foundation Training Programme, in addition the childminders must complete Tusla Children First E-Learning programme and attach their certificate as part of their ‘Evidence of Learning’.

The working group recommends the Foundation Training Programme and the ‘Evidence of learning’ link to the QDP. The group suggests that the assessment process for both training programmes be similar e.g. same layout so the QDP is clearly building on skills and knowledge acquired in the Foundation Training Programme. The content of ‘Evidence of Learning’ achieved in the Foundation Training Programme should form a starting point for the QDP portfolio, this will give the participants the insight into what is required with the portfolio therefore reducing any fears/anxieties over the task of completing the QDP portfolio.

Incentives

The working group held many discussions on the types of incentives required to maximise the numbers of childminders completing the Foundation Training Programme and subsequently registering with Tusla. The group recommends that incentives are linked to those who are actively operating as a childminder. The group also identified that some incentives may need to have certain conditions applied e.g. CMDG has a commitment to operate as a childminder for 2 years.

The group identified that the Foundation Training Programme will be fully funded by the DCEDIY and therefore with no cost implication for the childminders this should increase the numbers of childminders accessing the training.

‘Participation in the Foundation Training Programme and the Quality Development Programme will be either part or wholly funded by DCEDIY’ (NAPC, 2021).

The working group recognised that the success of the Foundation Training Programme will be dependent on participants ability to access the most appropriate IT equipment, therefore a technology grant is recommended for participants to purchase a compatible device. Although the learning platform is mobile compatible, it is not recommended that the training be completed on a mobile device. The working group members who have worked with childminders, attending networks

and training events have previous experience of the challenges childminders face when the appropriate equipment is not accessible to them.

The group discussed the current requirements for applying for the Childminding Development Grant and recommends that completion of the Foundation Training Programme become a requirement, this will provide another incentive for childminders to complete the training programme.

The working group held discussions in relation to creating a database of childminders who have completed the Foundation Training Programme (similar to the list held by the CCCs for childminders who are voluntarily notified) for parents to access childcare and this will reassure parents that the childminders who have completed the Foundation Training Programme have begun the process of registering with Tusla with full registration achieved when the childminding specific regulations are in place.

The group acknowledged the existing incentive available to childminders, the Childcare Services Relief. The group recommends consultation with Revenue to review the Childcare Service Relief, with a view to increasing the tax exemption and making it accessible to all childminders who complete the Foundation Training Programme. The group stressed the importance of consulting with Revenue to regulate this process including monitoring the applications for the tax relief. Further discussions are required, and this will be an action for the NAPC Advisory group on Funding and Financial Supports.

The working group highlighted that some childminders embarking on training (regardless of the type, accredited or non-accredited), recognition of successful completion will be crucial to prompt a sense of achievement and build confidence to progress to the next level, the QDP. The group recommends an appropriate graduation/celebration should be held on completion of the programme.

Further consideration for the NAPC Advisory group on Training and Supports

- The working group discussed the importance of promoting and launching the Foundation Training Programme, emphasising the course as an easy pathway for childminders, to prevent increasing levels of anxiety and resistance towards the training which will ultimately discourage childminders from engaging.
- The group identified the need to establish responsibility for the administration of the Foundation Training Programme and all associated administration processes related to the training- registration, attendance, certification, evaluation.
- The group recommends that once the childminding specific regulations have been established Tusla should provide QRF training specifically for childminders.
- In relation to recognition of prior learning the group discussed childminders who hold relevant qualifications who are exempt from registering with Tusla and for those who are registered with Tusla under current regulations. Many of these childminders have completed the process of registration and years of training/ college at their own cost. The working group recommends that these childminders should be recognised under the new regulations and exempt from completing the full Foundation Training Programme. However, the group did

discuss the importance of continuing professional development and developing quality practice for all childminders and therefore, recommend that childminders who are registered under current regulations should be able opt-in to complete certain modules, attend staffed local networks and access other training e.g. Child Protection, First Aid etc.

- The working group emphasises the importance of evaluation and recommends monitoring and evaluations across all areas of the Foundation Training Programme including learner evaluations, trainer evaluations, pilot programme with volunteers (childminders, parents' children), take up of incentives, assessment of portfolios, built in assessment of learning in LMS, completion of training, interviews, focus groups etc

3. Features of Quality Development Programme Training

Features	Delivery	Platforms	Duration	Portfolio	Incentives
<p>5 modules + Portfolio</p> <p>Linked to the Role Profile of a Childminder:</p> <p>Key tasks & responsibilities</p> <p>Business side of Childminding</p> <p>Child Development (ELC/ SAC/ Mixed Age groups)</p> <p>Life Learning and Learning through Play – Aistear and Sóolta Frameworks and Aistear Sóolta Practice guide</p> <p>Health & Well-being</p> <p>Relationships with children and partnership with parents and families</p>	<p>Blended approach – both face to face as well as online</p> <p>Optional face to face sessions (1 per module) with dates/ venues decided in advance</p> <p>One induction day, face to face</p> <p>Online forum for extra support</p> <p>Optional live lessons/ weekly check ins with tutor</p> <p>Local delivery – tender process</p> <p>Blended approach to Peer Training Support</p>	<p>Online lessons – pre-recorded, voice over, auto-script</p> <p>Learning Management System (LMS), also available in mobile app</p> <p>Post Covid: virtual/ face to face</p> <p>IT support e.g. Device set up, training, support accessing and navigating the LMS, uploading portfolio etc.</p>	<p>CMs have the option to complete the QDP over a number of years</p> <p>Must complete a minimum number of modules per year</p> <p>Option to work at childminder’s own pace</p> <p>CM can complete modules as quickly or as slowly as they desire within the timeframe</p>	<p>Reflective/ Continuous practice</p> <p>Photo evidence/ short statements (similar template for CMs as used in FTP)</p> <p>Use app to upload evidence</p> <p>Show prior learning linked to module areas</p> <p>Show day to day activities linked to module areas</p> <p>Some elements may already be completed within FTP</p> <p>Must provide valid Always Children First certificate as part of Portfolio</p>	<p>Extend Learner fund bursary to include part or full funding for QDP</p> <p>Promotion of funding programmes</p> <p>Specific operational grant for those who have completed FT to support with QDP</p> <p>Graduation ceremony</p> <p>Free Always Children First foundation training via CCCs</p>

<p>Working with the local community</p> <p>Should be more in-depth and more detail to build upon the Foundation Training Programme</p> <p>Elective/ Mandatory modules e.g. school age etc.</p>	<p>networks mid-way through each module (include stakeholder support)</p> <p>Evaluation</p>			<p>Certificate of completion issued</p> <p>Self-evaluation form</p>	
--	---	--	--	---	--

Rationale for Quality Development Programme

The working group have agreed on the features of the Quality Development Programme (QDP) for childminders. A subgroup on the features of training held 6 meetings outside of the main working group and had many discussions on all elements of the QDP. The subgroup presented the features to the main working group who agreed. The working group recommendations are based on the National Action Plan for Childminding (NAPC, 2021) and the commitment made by Government in First 5:

‘A Quality Development Programme of training and mentoring that is specific to childminding will also be developed, offering childminders a local, supported pathway to quality development and recognition of their skills and experience. The Quality Development Programme will result in a special purpose award at Level 5 on the NFQ, significantly smaller in scale than a major Level 5 award. Tusla-registered childminders will be required to complete this Quality Development Programme over a period of years. In order to remain registered, a childminder will have to demonstrate progression through the training and mentoring programme. The number of years for completion of the programme will be determined during Phase 1 when the programme is being developed, but completion of the programme for the initial cohort of registered childminders will be by 2028’. (NAPC, 2021)

‘All regulated childminders will hold a minimum qualification (level to be determined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs by end 2019 in follow-up to the Expert Group Report). An appropriate period of time will be provided to meet this requirement.’ (First 5)

The working group recommends that the QDP would be a QQI Level 5 special purpose award, this will enable transferability to a full major award e.g. individual module exemptions or credits. Therefore, if a childminder chooses to move to another ELC or SAC setting recognition of this prior learning could be considered.

The working group recommends that prior to beginning QDP and on completion of the Foundation Training Programme childminders should hold a valid First Aid certificate (the level will be dependent on new regulatory requirements) and a valid Children First E-Learning certificate.

Features

The working group discussed the content of the training programme and recommends (in line with the content of the Foundation Training Programme) each module should be linked to the role profile of a childminder and should be weighted in importance. The group recommends that each module should build on the learning achieved from the Foundation Training Programme and with more in-depth detail of each unit therefore enabling childminders to reflect on prior learning and to build on the knowledge gained in the Foundation Training Programme.

The working group recommends a mixture of core modules and elective modules similar to a QQI Level 5 Childcare major award, this will enable the childminders to select modules they feel are relevant to the age group they care for or the areas they feel they need to upskill in. The core and elective modules will be decided by the NAPC Steering group.

Consideration will also be needed to support childminders where English is not their first language to ensure all childminders have equal opportunities to complete the training.

Delivery

The working group recommends a blended approach to the delivery of the QDP, including online and face to face sessions. The childminders should have a choice of a mix of day/evenings and weekend sessions ensuring all childminders have the opportunity to engage in the training programme. Therefore, the group recommends the online course should be delivered asynchronously. The group recommends an induction day as an introduction to the programme and clearly identify from the offset the expectations and commitment required to complete the training programme. The working group acknowledges that the location of the face-to-face sessions will be crucial to ensure all childminders can participate. The group recommends that childminders should have the choice to attend a session that is most convenient to them and not confined by county boundaries.

The group recognises that the level of supports required to complete the QDP will vary greatly with some childminders needing a high level of mentoring and support and others needing minimal support. As the QDP may be achieved over a number of years, the group identified the need for face-to-face sessions possibly quarterly with regular virtual check in sessions. This will be paramount to ensure continued interest, engagement from the childminders, to facilitate childminders getting to know each other and this will lay the foundation for childminding networks. The group recommends setting clear targets/tasks to be achieved within each quarter, this will provide direction for the childminders. Outside of these quarterly meetings the group identifies the role the staffed local network leader will play in supporting childminders engaging in both the Foundation Training Programme and the QDP (phase 2 of the NAPC).

Consideration is needed to decide if a train the trainer programme will be required when the QDP is being developed.

Platform

The working group recommends using the same Learning Management System used for the Foundation Training Programme (pg 15) and the Training programme for the staffed local network leader (pg 40). This is a Microsoft 365 based programme using word, excel, PowerPoint which many people have some experience of and is mobile compatible. The majority of childminders will already be familiar with this system from the FTP and therefore will make the QDP more user friendly and easier to access for the childminder.

The group recommend a blended approach using the Learning Management System 365 platform and the features of Child in Mind training. Although the Child in Mind training is a shorter training programme, elements such as the layout of the units, self-paced approach and the useful resources are all positive elements that the NAPC Steering Group and Advisory Group on Training and Supports could refer to when developing the QDP further.

Duration

The working group recommends the QDP training be completed over a number of years as outlined in the NAPC:

'Tusla-registered childminders will be required to complete this Quality Development Programme over a period of years' (NAPC, 2021)

The group recognises that some childminders will progress through the programme at a faster pace than others and flexibility is needed to ensure the duration of the programme reflects this. The group recommends including a minimum period to complete the programme with a minimum number of modules per year etc. This will provide focus and motivation for the childminders to complete the programme.

The working group acknowledges that these features will be decided by the NAPC Steering Group.

Portfolio

The working group recommends a portfolio for the assessment process of the QDP. The group recommends a follow-on approach from the 'Evidence of Practice' assessment for the Foundation Training Programme. The portfolio should reflect on the childminding practice including the day-to-day activities the children engage in, linking these to the learning goals of the programme modules. The portfolio should consist of a mixture of photographic evidence and statements linking practice to theory. The group recognises the importance of reflective practice to ensure high quality care for children.

'Reflective practice requires that the individual practitioner engages in thought processes that make her/him aware, in a critical way, of her/his everyday activities with a view to continuously improving and refining practice' (Sjolta, 2006)

Incentives

The working group recommends the QDP training should be fully funded. This will ensure that financial implications will not prove a barrier and the maximum number of childminders can access the training programme.

Tusla registered childminders will be able to offer the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and parents can avail of subsidies towards their childcare costs. The group recognises this as a central incentive for the childminders to complete the training programme and remain registered with Tusla. The group recommends further promotion of the NCS scheme and the benefits it provides.

If FAR is a requirement for registration under the new childminding specific regulations, the group recommends an increase in the FAR Bursary for childminders towards the end of Phase 1 and prior to regulatory change in phase 2. This training has a significant cost and may prove to be a deterrent for childminder engagement. The working group recommends a specific grant for childminders who have completed the Foundation Training Programme to support them to undertake and complete the QDP.

The working group recommends that incentives are targeted towards those who are actively operating as a childminder. Some incentives may need to have provisions attached e.g. CMDG has a commitment to operate as a childminder for 2 years.

The working group identified the opportunities available for Tusla registered services to avail of training and CPD events delivered by their local CCC that may not currently be available to all childminders.

The working group highlighted the commitment required by childminders to complete this level of training and recommend an appropriate graduation/celebration should be held on completion of the programme.

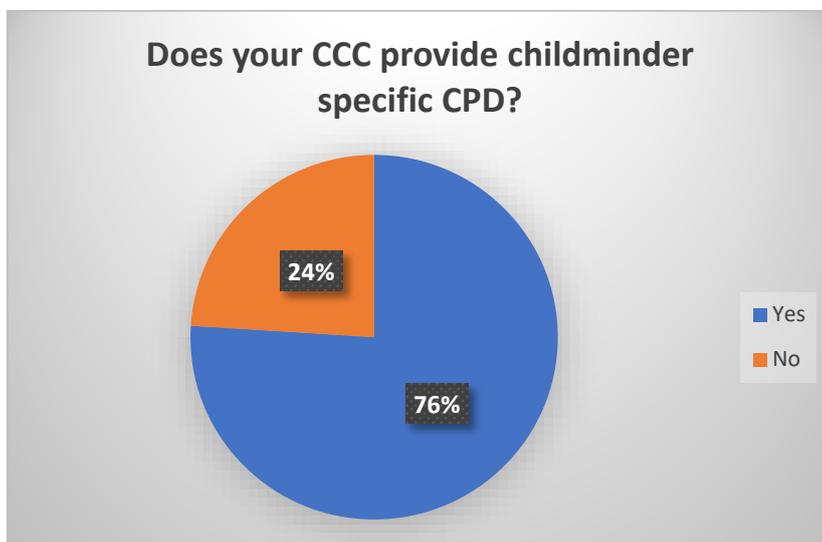
Recommendations to the Steering Group

- Current courses and modules are very centre based. The group recommends developing Level 5, Level 6 and Level 7 Childminding specific training to enable career progression and a career pathway for childminders which has not previously been available (only 1 elective module 'Childminding Practice' in full Level 5 award)
- Recognition of a childminder's/ potential childminder's prior learning should be taken into account. This will be considered and decided by the NAPC Advisory group on Training and Supports.
- In relation to recognition of prior learning the group discussed childminders who hold relevant qualifications who are exempt from registering with Tusla and for those who are registered with Tusla under current regulations. Many of these childminders have completed the process of registration and years of training/ college at their own cost. The working group recommends that these childminders should be recognised under the new regulations and exempt from completing the full Foundation Training Programme. Prior learning should be taken into consideration when determining the QDP modules requirement for these specific childminders.
- The NAPC Steering group to review the Childminding Staffed Local Network survey analysis which provides suggestions on other training and supports childminders would like to see e.g. tax returns, support to cover time off and which could be incorporated into some of the content/modules in this training programme.
- The NAPC Steering group to consider including a self-evaluation framework as part of the content and the portfolio which will tie in with any proposed national self-evaluation framework. This may also ensure transferability between childminding and centre-based practice.
- Suggestions for monitoring and evaluation across all aspects of the features of training which could include learner evaluations, trainer evaluations, pilot programme with volunteers (childminders, parents' children), take up of incentives, assessment of portfolios, build in assessment of learning in LMS, completion of training, interviews, focus groups etc

4. Other training

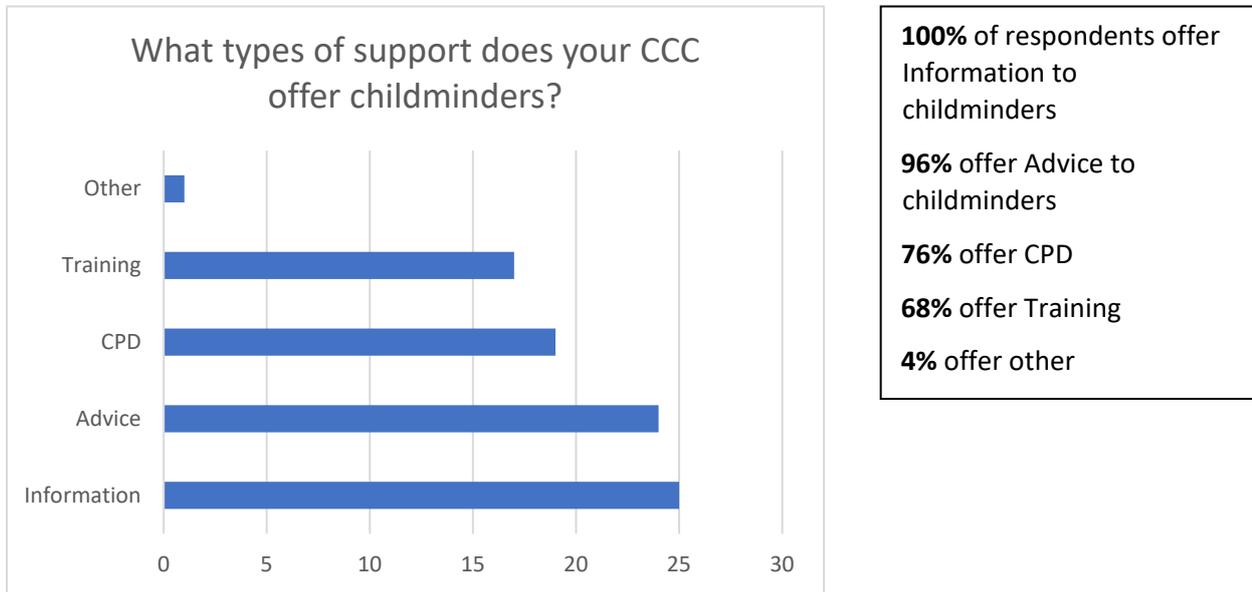
The working group discussed other training opportunities that may be needed by childminders. The group outlined in the recommendations for the content of the Foundation Training Programme (pg 15) and the QDP (pg 23) that all aspects of childminding practice and provision are included. The role of the staffed local childminding networks in Phase 2 is to provide opportunities for childminders to engage in CPD and practical workshops, it is envisaged that this will be demand led in each area in relation to the types of CPD/workshops e.g. promoting positive behaviour, effective communications etc.

The group recommends that all childminders should have the opportunity to engage in the training and CPD currently available to the ELC and SAC services delivered by the CCCs and the NVCOs. However, the group identified the need for specific childminding focused training and CPD nationally (currently 24% of CCCs do not provide childminder specific CPD) to ensure the training and CPD is relevant to the childminding setting.



5. Other Supports

The group recognises the level of support currently available from the NVCOs and the CCCs and commend the commitment made by all relevant bodies to support childminders. Findings from both the survey for NVCOs mapping of childminding training and supports survey (2021) and the Sonra collection completed by the CCCs highlighted the types of supports provided to childminders.



The working group identifies the continuous support childminders will require throughout the implementation of the plan. Childminders will need support to complete both the Foundation Training Programme and the QDP. The supports required are outlined and described on pg 15 and pg 23.

6. Options for the design and rollout of staffed local childminding networks, on the basis of research into effective childminder network models in other jurisdictions

The Staffed Local Childminding Network (SLN) subgroup held 6 meetings outside of the main working group to discuss options for the SLN design and rollout. Subgroup members took into consideration all the feedback and the following design is recommended. The full working group agreed with the subgroup recommendations.

The working group are making the following recommendation based on the National Action Plan for Childminding (NAPC), the research conducted into childminder networks in other jurisdictions and the findings from the childminder survey on Staffed Local Networks in May 2021.

Benefits/Potential Benefits

The working group discussed the benefits for childminders who engage with a staffed local childminding network. The childminders will benefit from peer support, mentoring support, become part of a community of practice, receive advice and support on all elements of their childminding business and practice and ultimately this will benefit childminders, the children and families that avail of a childminding service. Childminders will potentially be viewed in a more professional manner helping to raise the profile of childminding.

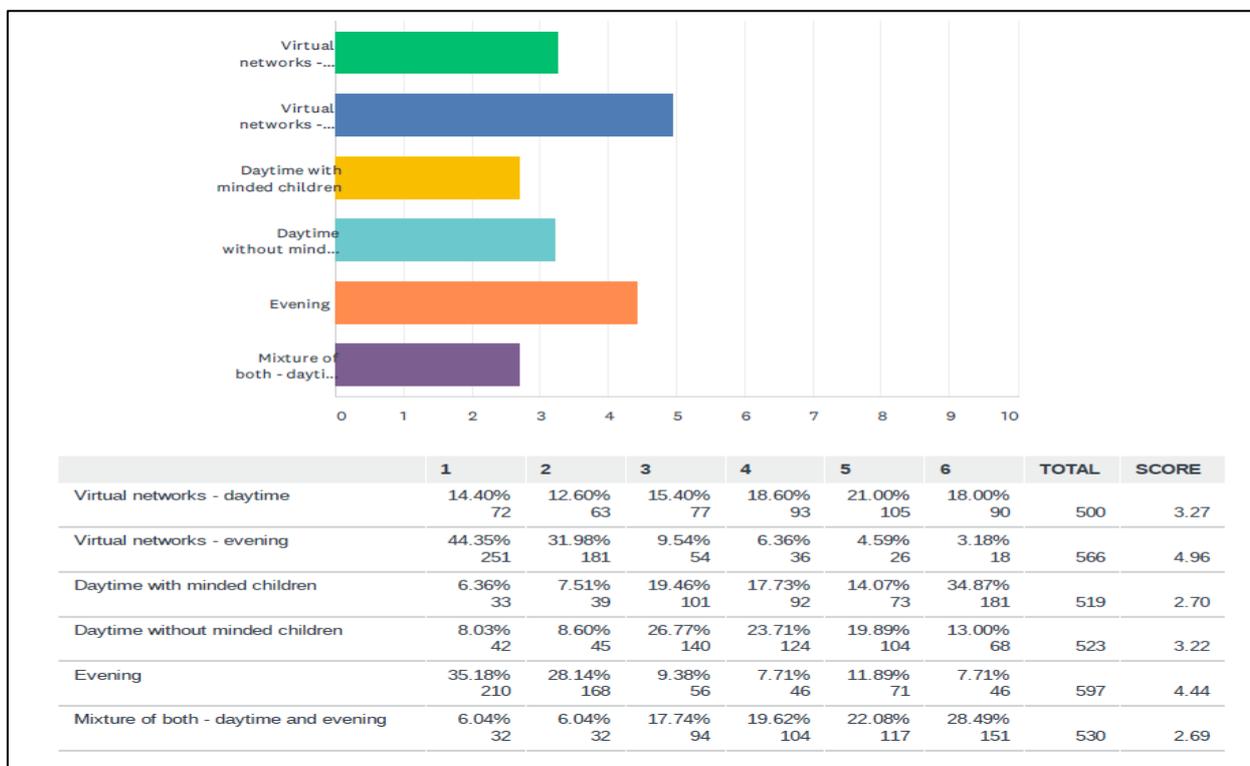
Location

The working group acknowledges that the location of the networks will be crucial to ensure all childminders can participate. The group recommends that childminders should have the choice to attend a network that is most convenient to them and not confined by county boundaries. The working group recommends the role of the leader will include the accommodation of network meetings in a blended approach and in a number of locations within their jurisdiction on a rota basis, to ensure childminders have equal opportunities to attend.

The group identifies the availability of the locations to facilitate a staff local childminding network will vary greatly between urban and rural areas however locations such as community centres, family resource centres, primary care centres, City and County Childcare Committees (CCC), education centres and libraries are recommended as possible venues.

Operating hours

The working group discussed the hours of operation of the networks and taking into consideration the findings from the survey results recommend that a mix of both daytime, evening and an online option should be offered to childminders to ensure maximum participation.



⁵'Virtual Networks in the evening were ranked the most suitable with 251 (44.35%) with evening networks ranked second most suitable with 210 (35.18%). Daytime with minded children was ranked least suitable by 181 (34.87%) followed by mixture of both daytime and evening with 151 (28.49%)'

Communication

The working group recommends a funded communication strategy for both childminders and parents as this will be fundamental to the promotion and success of the networks. The group discussed other methods of communication to promote participation in the networks including social media channels, local advertisement, a national campaign, dedicated webpage. The group stressed the importance of involving all relevant stakeholders in the communication process including childminders, children, parents, ELC and SAC services and national schools etc.

Parents

The group suggests the networks would provide opportunities for parents to access information in relation to childminding, promote communication between parents and childminders and possibly provide events for parents. Parents will gain reassurance that childminders are engaging in a network that has a support mechanism in place and will professionalise the childminding sector.

Features of the networks

The working group discussed the concept of including a criteria for joining the networks e.g. only active childminders could attend. The group reflected on this and recommended that local staffed networks should be open and accessible to all childminders or potential childminders and ultimately the goal is to improve engagement in the networks and therefore increase the numbers of childminders completing the training programmes and subsequently registering with Tusla. The group recommends that a role for the leader of the networks will be to monitor membership for each network. The group also discussed the importance of having a code of practice in place in the networks for all stakeholders to ensure the networks run smoothly.

⁵ Childminder survey on Staffed Local Networks in May 2021

The working group recommends that the networks should provide a range of networking opportunities for childminders. The group emphasises the importance of creating an environment where childminders can experience the benefits of peer support, advice and support sessions, mentoring support from the leaders and opportunities to enhance the quality of their childminding practice. The group identified the opportunity for the network to become a point of contact for childminders to access support in relation to all areas of the childminding business, the group envisages a role for the network leader will be to direct the childminder to the relevant agencies for support.

The working group recommends that the networks provide opportunities for the minded children to attend the networks in a play-based environment, enjoying toy libraries and interacting with a mixed age range of children.

The working group discussed the opportunities for childminders to avail of home visits from the network leader in a supportive role. The group reflected on practices in the past when the childminding advisory officers located within the CCCs made home visits to childminders and this proved very beneficial. Research conducted by the working group revealed that 84% of the jurisdictions researched provided home visits to childminders.

Training supports for childminders

The working group discussed the role of the leader in supporting childminders throughout the Foundation Training Programme and the QDP.

'Participation in the Quality Development Programme will be supported through the progressive rollout of staffed local childminding networks across the country which will provide peer support and will support continuing professional development for childminders (NAPC, 2021).'

The group identifies the diverse needs and abilities of childminders and the level of support required will vary greatly. The networks should provide a favourable learning environment to suit all childminders and the leaders should ensure childminders are supported in a positive, motivational manner always showing empathy.

The working group discussed the possibilities of providing a range of CPD opportunities for childminders at the networks. The group identifies the diversity in the types of childminders and the variation in the age range of the children cared for, specific CPD/training/workshops are recommended to target all childminders, those who care for preschool age children and school age children.

Community of practice for network leaders

The group recommends a national approach to the networks and suggest a centralised system that could direct childminders to networks dependent on the location and the services provided. The group identifies that the networks will vary in practice however, the group recommends that consistency will be crucial to the success of the networks nationally, a core programme of events allowing for flexibility depending on the resources/ materials available to each network leader and also the needs/interests of the network members.

The group recommends a 'community of practice' for the network leaders to enhance the practice within the networks and also support the leaders in the day-to-day operation of the network. Collaboration between networks will provide a number of benefits for all stakeholders.

Further consideration for the Advisory Group on Training and Supports

The working group recommends a process be developed to ensure a smooth transition for those childminders who are currently engaged with childminding networks in their local area.

The working group emphasised the importance of evaluation of all areas of the staffed local childminding networks and recommends a detailed plan is implemented to ensure this is carried out effectively.

Relief cover for childminders

The working group acknowledge feedback from the childminding survey on Staffed Local Networks where a number of childminders highlighted the need for relief cover, however the working group were not in a position to discuss options on how this would be implemented given the complexities/responsibilities this would entail.

7. Role Profile of a Staffed Local Network Leader

Leaders of staffed local childminding networks will facilitate peer support and support the continuing professional development of childminders. Their role will also involve supporting participation in training, reflective practice, self-evaluation and teamwork (NAPC, 2021).

Section 1: Key Tasks and Responsibilities:

- Have a comprehensive knowledge of the childminding sector
- Establish and foster effective communication and working relationships with childminders
- Provide information, advice and support to childminders on quality childminding practice
- Establish and foster effective communication and working relationships with relevant organisations
- Lead and advocate for inclusive, high-quality childminding practice in the home environment
- Promote a child-centered approach to childminding in partnership with children
- Support childminders to work in partnership with parents
- Provide support to childminders in the development, implementation and regular review of their policies, procedures and record keeping practice
- Source and/or deliver, where relevant, appropriate CPD opportunities relating to high-quality childminding practice
- Provide mentoring and support to childminders engaged in professional development
- Support childminders to establish and foster positive and effective relationships with children they care for and their families
- Facilitate and support childminders with the Foundation Training Programme and the QDP
- Promote and support childminders compliance with legislation, regulations and contractual obligations relevant to home-based care
- Respect and promote privacy and confidentiality for childminders, children and their families at all times
- Have a comprehensive knowledge of and promote evidence based ELC/SAC approaches to learning and national curriculum frameworks
- Adhere to the governance structure that applies to the role of the leader
- Available to work flexible hours including evenings and weekends
- Engage in regular continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities to review and improve professional knowledge and skills including activities such as self-reflection and evaluation
- Maintain appropriate records in line with quality record-keeping and contribute to relevant reports and evaluations as required
- Maintain awareness of quality ELC/SAC provision and practice in the wider local and national context

Section 2: Child Development

- Have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of child development
- Have an in-depth understanding of the central role of the childminder in supporting and promoting the holistic development of children through play and quality experiences
- Have a comprehensive understanding of the significance of family, social, cultural and environmental factors on child development, well-being, communicating, identity and learning
- Have a clear understanding of the primacy of the role of the child's parents in all decisions that impact on the child's development, learning and wellbeing and promote this among childminders

Section 3: Life learning and learning through play

- Promote and support the principles of the relevant national frameworks, Aistear and Síolta and their associated practice resources
- Support childminders in planning and providing high quality play opportunities
- Support childminders in planning, creating and maintaining child-centred indoor and outdoor environments that ensure children's safety, security and wellbeing

- Support childminders to offer stimulating engaging and enriching opportunities for experiences that support and promote children’s health, wellbeing, learning and development
- Promote the benefits of involving children in the day-to-day experiences, activities and routines of the home

Section 4: Health and Wellbeing

- Promote an awareness of the importance of social and emotional wellbeing
- Support childminders to develop and evaluate a range of quality, appropriately informed activities to support and promote the safety, health, and wellbeing of children
- Promote and support childminders to participate in relevant mandatory training

Section 5: Working with families and within the local community

- Promote childminders’ awareness of the importance of developing and maintaining positive relationships with families and provide supports for childminders’ communication with parents
- Support childminders to work in partnership with children and parents
- Have a knowledge of the public services and amenities available locally and nationally, supporting childminders to use these appropriately for the benefit of children and families
- Provide information, resources and advice that support childminders to provide ethical, rights-based, inclusive and participatory practices and ensures that the voice of the child is heard, listened to and acted upon

Section 6: Leadership, Communication & Administration

- Demonstrate effective management, leadership, organisational, IT and communication skills
- Demonstrate leadership and mentoring skills that empower and motivate childminders
- Advocate on behalf of children, families and childminders in relation to the childminding sector at both local and national level
- Establish and co-ordinate the effective operation and management of a childminding network
- Ability to deliver the established training programmes
- Perform the financial and administrative practices necessary for the effective and efficient operation of a childminding network
- Support childminders to develop their business skills e.g. filing tax returns, grant applications, Tusla registration
- Knowledge and understanding of organisational structures and reporting requirements and practices
- Demonstrate strong positive interpersonal and intrapersonal skills in all interactions with a wide range of stakeholders, in particular childminders and children
- Develop and implement an effective system of monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the tasks linked to the staffed local networks and of the roll out of the NAPC
- Engage and collaborate with network leaders in other areas

Please note parent has the same meaning as those with parental responsibility

Rationale for Role Profile of Staffed Local Network Leader

The working group have developed and agreed a role profile for the leader of the staffed local childminding networks. A subgroup on the staffed local childminding networks held...? meetings, with responsibility for a number of actions including the role profile of the leader. Taking into consideration feedback and input from all members, the working group have agreed on the role profile. The working group recommendations are based on the National Action Plan for Childminding (NAPC, 2021), findings from the consultation report on the Draft Childminding Action Plan (2019) and findings from the childminder survey on Staffed Local Networks in May 2021

The leader of the networks will require a number of high-level skills including leadership skills, proficient organisational skills, mentoring skills, excellent communication and interpersonal skills. The leader will have an array of responsibilities and the working group stressed the importance that the role profile reflects this.

Research conducted by the working group revealed that:

⁶Networks with specially trained staff who had received professional development in infant-toddler caregiving in family childcare contexts were more effective than networks without specially trained staff. Further research outlined that ⁷Network staff also need to have the knowledge and skills to work with adult learners and training in cultural competence because they may be serving providers with backgrounds that differ from their own.

The working group referred to the NAPC which outlines:

'Given their planned roles in supporting training and the understanding of childminding that will be required of them, the leaders of local childminding networks will have a relevant qualification as well as training that is specific to their role (NAPC, 2021)'

Therefore, the working group recommends that the leader of the networks hold a relevant minimum QQI Level 5 Award with completion of a specific training programme as part of the induction period (pg.40)

The working group have divided the role profile of the leader into 6 sections: Key Tasks and Responsibilities, Child Development, Life Learning and Learning through Play, Health and Wellbeing, Working with Families and Within the local Community and Leadership, Communication and Administration.

Key Tasks and Responsibilities

The working group discussed the wide range of key tasks and responsibilities the leader will undertake as part of their role. The leader will be responsible for the promotion of an inclusive network environment and within the childminding setting, ensuring all childminders, children, their parents and relevant stakeholders are respected and benefit from the network.

⁶ Bromer, J. and Henly, J.R. (2009) *'The work-family support roles of child care providers across settings'*, Early Childhood Research Quarterly. vol. 23(3), pp. 271-288

⁷ Bromer, J. & Bibbs, T. (2011). *Improving support services for family child care through relationship-based training*. Zero to Three special issue on family child care, 31 (5), p. 30

⁸Research suggests that early childhood practitioners, inspectors, lecturers, trainers and others involved in the early childhood sector who critically explore their own attitudes and practices provide more inclusive environments....Openly respecting and engaging with difference is beneficial and essential for all children and adults.

The working group discussed the role the leader will play in promoting quality childminding practices therefore the group recommends the leader has a comprehensive knowledge of all areas of childminding including the business side of childminding.

The leader will play an important role in supporting childminders to engage with the Foundation Training Programme, QDP and CPD opportunities. Therefore, the working group recommends the leader must possess the relevant skills, knowledge and competencies to carry out this role. However, if there are any gaps in skills, knowledge and competencies, in particular in relation to the childminding sector, this can be addressed in the training programme for SLN leader.

The group identifies the benefits of a mentoring service as part of the network to support childminders in the provision of high-quality practice and support personal and professional development, which in turn will benefit children and families.

The working group discussed the working hours for the role of the leader. Childminders work long hours and may only be able to attend the networks in the evenings and the weekends, therefore, to ensure all childminders can access the networks the leader will be required to work a variety of hours. However, consideration is needed in relation to the working hours of the leader to ensure an appropriate work life balance when working unsocial hours.

The working group recommends the leader should have a knowledge of all relevant legislation, regulations and best practice to support the childminders to provide a high-quality environment for the children they care for.

The working group highlighted the importance of CPD for the leader and recommends the leader engage in CPD to ensure the information, support, guidance they are providing is accurate and up to date.

Child Development

The working group recommends the leader has a knowledge and understanding of child development. Having this knowledge will enable the leader to support and advise childminders in the provision of experiences and environments that will promote child development, therefore ensuring the best outcomes for the children in their care. The group recommends that the training programme for the SLN leader should include areas of child development.

The group also identifies the primacy of the role of the parent in the holistic development of their child and the leader should have an understanding and promote this with childminders. ⁹ Research demonstrates that better outcomes for children, in their cognitive and social development, emerged from early childhood settings where child-related information between staff and parents is shared.

⁸ Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education, 2016

⁹ Taggart, B. (2007). The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE)

Life learning and learning through play

The working group discussed the benefits of meaningful play experiences for children and recognised that childminders are in the optimum position to provide such opportunities. Childminders can provide children with activities and experiences that promote learning including engaging in life learning experiences. The working group recommends the leader should have the skills to support childminders in understanding the value and importance of play and in providing such experiences, therefore ensuring positive outcomes for children.

Health and Wellbeing

The working group recommends that the leader plays a role in supporting childminders to ensure children's safety, health and wellbeing are central when creating a childminding environment and providing daily experiences. The working group identifies the need for self-evaluation and reflection on all areas of childminding practice and recommends the leader supports the childminder with this process. The leader will also support childminders to engage in relevant mandatory training to ensure they possess the necessary skills to promote children's safety, health and wellbeing.

Working with families and within the local community

The working group recommends the leader of the networks should support childminders to work in partnership with children and parents. Building positive relationships between the childminder, the children and their parents is paramount and will foster effective communication between all stakeholders. When childminders work in collaboration with parents the best outcomes for children can be achieved.

The working group discussed the importance of children's involvement in their local community. Childminders take children to available amenities in their area, therefore, the leader of the network should be aware of local services and amenities and share these with childminders. Engagement within the community provides children with a sense of identity and belonging and provides children with a rich and diverse learning environment (Síoita, 2009).

Leadership, Communication & Administration

The working group discussed the many skills the leader of the network will require to ensure the efficient running of the networks. These skills include management, leadership, organisational, group facilitation, IT and communication skills. The role of the leader will require proficiency in multitasking, the leader will be working in collaboration with a number of stakeholders and must have the skills to adapt to a diverse range of tasks. The leader must be competent in administration practices including managing budgets, organising training sessions and events, sourcing external trainers etc.

The working group recommends the implementation of an effective system of monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the tasks linked to the staffed local networks and the rollout of the NAPC. Implementing this type of system will involve continuous reflection on daily practices to recognise the elements of the networks that work well and those elements that need to be reviewed. The group recommends the leader should work in collaboration with network leaders in other areas to create a community of practice for leaders which will provide valuable peer support.

8. Features of Training Programme for SLN Leaders

Features	Delivery	Platforms/ Support	Duration	Assessment
<p>Units- Link to the role profile of a childminder and role profile of the SLNL</p> <p>Units to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key tasks & responsibilities • Leadership • Communication • Facilitation Skills • Administration • Train the Trainer • Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific Time frame for training • Dates laid out in advance • Ongoing support in relation to assessment brief • Peer Training Support networks • Online lessons / face to face / blended learning • Weekly check in session with tutor as a group <p>Evaluation</p> <p>Coordination and administration support for tutor & participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme content and platform advertised for tender • Microsoft-Learning Management System (LMS) <p>Post Covid: virtual/ face to face</p> <p>Technology support</p>	<p>Duration dependent on content, candidates and delivery.</p> <p>Training programme prior to the role and networks beginning.</p> <p>Training programme as part of the role once the candidate is in post – induction period and all learning and assessment is completed within work time in advance of Networks beginning</p>	<p>Dependent on qualification level however may include some of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Observation • Skill Demonstration • Evidence of practice • Portfolio

Rationale for training programme for Staffed Local Network Leader

The working group have agreed on the features of the training programme for the staffed local childminding network leader. A subgroup on the Staffed local networks held 6 meetings outside of the main working group and had many discussions on all the elements of the training programme. The working group identified a vast range of skills that would be required by the leader to ensure they carry out the role effectively. The training programme must reflect this.

There were extensive discussions by the group in relation to the qualification requirement for the leader. The working group recommends that the leader holds a minimum QQI Level 5 relevant award, this is to ensure a wider cohort of applicants including childminders. The group identifies the complexities of the role and have concerns that the Level 5 qualification may not be sufficient to prepare the leader adequately for this role. Any gaps in skills, knowledge and competencies should be addressed in the training programme for SLN leader.

The group recommends the training programme should be a QQI Level 7 (minor/special purpose award) due to the role of the leader in supporting, mentoring, facilitating training and events for childminders. This is to ensure the leader gains the knowledge and skills to carry out the role competently. The group also recognises the commitment made by the Government in First 5:

¹⁰It aims at a graduate-led ELC workforce, in line with a recommendation in the EU Quality Framework for ECEC that all staff will have career development opportunities. There will also be a concerted effort to raise the status of and value placed on the ELC workforce, with a particular focus on supporting employers to provide more favourable working conditions that will attract and retain staff. These ambitions extend to childminding and school-age childcare'

The working group reflected on the consultation report conducted on the Draft Childminding Action Plan (2019):

¹¹A number of QQI level awards were suggested as being a requirement for childminding network leaders. The most common QQI award suggested by respondents as to what qualifications/experience should be required to be a childminding network leader was a QQI Level 6 major award. The next most common suggestion was a QQI Level 7 award for childminding network leaders'.

This training programme will be a unique programme, which will provide the leader with the skills to carry out the role. The group recommends the training be part of the induction process for the leader. The group recognises, especially during the pilot phase of the networks, the number of available positions will be limited and therefore the training should be part of the induction process. The working group recommends including in the network leader contract of employment the requirement to successfully complete this training programme prior to establishing the networks.

¹⁰ FIRST 5: A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT STRATEGY FOR BABIES, YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES (2019)

¹¹ Draft Action Plan for Childminding Report on the findings of the consultation process, July 2020

Features

The working group discussed the content of each unit within the training programme. The group linked the units to both the role profile of a childminder and the staffed local childminding network leaders. The group recognises that it is essential that the leader has a comprehensive knowledge of the childminding sector and the role of the childminder. This will ensure the leader can provide adequate advice, support and guidance.

The working group were reluctant to specify the number of units and believed the units should be weighted in importance. This would be decided by the NAPC Advisory group on Training and Supports.

Delivery

The working group recommends a blended approach to the delivery of the training programme including online and face to face lessons. The group recommends a specific time frame for completion of the training programme. It is paramount that each participant receives ongoing support in relation to the content of the training, the training platform and the assessment process. To ensure each participant is supported the group recommends weekly check in sessions with the tutor as a group and also individually.

The working group recognises that for the pilot stage of the networks it would be favourable for the leaders to commence the training programme for the SLN leader as a group, however, consideration must be made in the event that this is not possible and a person starts in the role at a later date. Therefore, the group recommends recording all training sessions to cover this eventuality.

The group recommends block training on commencement with additional CPD (minor Level 7) throughout the year/years, specific to the role to ensure incremental, accessible and supported career pathway for the leader.

Platform/Supports

The working group discussed the possible platforms for the training programme and recommends the Learning Management System LMS365 as outlined in the Features of Foundation Training Programme (pg 15) and the QDP (pg 23). The group recommends this platform to ensure consistency throughout the learning programmes. The leader will be in a more favourable position to support childminders completing the training programmes if they themselves are familiar with the system.

The group recommends the leaders should have access to technical support for both navigating and completing the training programme and to carry out the role. The training is recommended as part of the induction process therefore effectiveness and efficiency of the system will be crucial. The group recommends support and supervision to commence on appointment of the role by the line manager/supervisor of the leader, this will allow prompt identification of challenges the leader are facing.

Duration

The working group discussed the duration of the training programme. The programme is recommended as part of the role once the leader is in post and during the induction period and all learning and assessment is therefore completed within work time in advance of networks beginning. The group identifies that the pilot stage of the operation of the networks will be dependent on the duration of the training programme. The leader must complete the training prior to establishing the networks to ensure they have gained the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to carry out the role effectively.

Assessment

The working group discussed the assessment process for the training programme and recommends a variety of assessment methods to ensure all learning styles are taken into consideration. The assessment could include skills demonstrations, evidence of practice, portfolios etc. The group recommends the assessment methods reflect the content of the training programme units and the skills required for the role.

Incentives

The working group discussed the number of incentives for the leader to complete the training programme. Once the leader has completed the training programme at a Level 7 minor/special purpose award, this will enable them to progress to a full Level 7 qualification. The training programme will form part of the induction process and therefore will have no cost implications for the leader. The leader will gain a number of skills when completing the programme therefore progressing personally and professionally.

Recommendations for steering group

The working group recommends the following actions for the NAPC Steering group and Advisory groups:

- A specific graduate/degree Level 7 for childminding to provide childminders with the opportunity to become graduates if they choose. Furthermore, the group recommends that leaders who have completed the above training programme should have the opportunity to transfer this minor/special purpose Level 7 award achieved to the proposed Level 7 award for childminders. In the absence of this degree other equivalent Level 7 awards should be identified.
- Further research to ascertain the qualifications of childminders currently operating in Ireland.
- Links with ELC and SAC quality support systems e.g. Always Children First, Aistear/Síolta mentoring programme

- Governance of the role will need to be established, identifying the line management structure of the leader
- Post Covid, the training could be best delivered in a blended way, including face to face sessions, online live sessions and online pre-recorded sessions
- Consideration needs to be given to the role of the oversight/supervisory body in relation to the training. Even if the training is outsourced whoever is overseeing the operation of the networks nationally should be heavily involved in the development/delivery of any training.
- Consider blending existing courses i.e. Level 6 Train the Trainer into the training programme
- Requirement of commitment to remain in role having been provided with training (conditions including a minimum period of commitment as part of the contract of employment)
- Consideration needs to be given to future delivery of networks e.g. vacancies due to resignations, maternity leave etc. It may be problematic if the leaders need to complete this training in full before they can facilitate networks

- The working group emphasises the importance of evaluation and recommends monitoring and evaluations across all areas of the Training Programme for the leader including learner evaluations, trainer evaluations, assessment of portfolios, built in assessment of learning in LMS, completion of training, interviews, focus groups etc.

9: Timeline for the piloting and evaluation of the staffed local childminding networks

The working group discussed the timeline for the piloting and evaluation of the staffed local childminding networks and referred to the National Action Plan for Childminding (NAPC) for direction. Over the course of the NAPC a quality development structure for childminding will be developed, which will include staffed local networks for childminders. The final decision as to which type of on-going quality support to provide to childminders will depend both on the research and costings in Phase 1 and on the outcome of the Review of Systems and Structures for early learning and care and school-age childcare that commenced in late 2020.

The NAPC is set out on a phased basis and the timing of these phases will be budget-dependent and subject to agreement with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.



Phase 1

Phase 1 will involve detailed planning and putting in place the building blocks for the transition. This will include consultation and further research on many aspects of the plan, as well as development of the infrastructure required.

The working group welcomes the approach of further research, which the group previously indicated in the progress report (01/04/201). Although the group found the research conducted as part of the WDP phase 2- Training and Supports for childminders beneficial, the group identified the limitations of the findings, in particular the quality assurance of the networks.

Phase 2: Piloting

The working group discussed the importance of piloting and evaluating the effectiveness of the networks in phase 2 of the NAPC. Piloting of the networks will enable the stakeholders to identify the effectiveness of the networks and any shortcomings.

To ensure the piloting of the networks captures a true reflection, the working group discussed the importance of piloting a diverse range of networks. The working group recognise that childminders provide care for a range of mixed aged children and recommend that a mixture of network types are offered e.g. networks for Childminders who care for preschool children only, school age children only or a mix of both and CPD opportunities provided reflect the relevant age group.

The working group also recognised the importance of the location of the staffed local childminding networks and recommend that the pilots are in a mixture of urban and rural locations. The group discussed the importance of accessibility and choice for childminders and recommends that childminders should be able to choose the network they wish to attend. For this reason, the group recommends that the networks should not be county bound but located in areas that will maximise opportunities for participation.

The working group recommends a pilot of a small number of staffed local childminding networks, dispersed around the country, for the pilot stage in phase 2 of the NAPC. The duration of the pilots will be dependent on a number of factors including cost implications, participation, recruitment of staff local network leaders. The group identified that this would be a consideration for the NAPC Steering group and the Advisory Group on Training and Supports established in phase 1.

Evaluation

The working group emphasises the importance of evaluation and recommends both continuous monitoring throughout the pilot stage of the networks and an in-depth evaluation process upon its completion. The working group recommends that all stakeholders should be involved in the evaluation process including childminders, staff local network leaders, parents, children and any other relevant stakeholders.

Evaluation of the staffed local networks should provide guidance for roll out of the network in Phase 3 and identify areas that are working well and also the areas that need amendment prior to phase 3 of the NAPC.

10. Further Action

The working group recommends that the steering group of the WDP consider the proposals outlined in this report and upon agreement make recommendations to the steering group of the NAPC. The working group recommends the NAPC steering group organise focus groups of childminders as a starting point of the next phase of the consultation process. Continuous consultation and communication with childminders will be vital throughout the implementation of the NAPC.