



## *Summary Report*

*An NCB NI research project funded by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)*



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**DELIVERING SOCIAL CHANGE**

**Childminding in  
Northern Ireland:**  
an exploration of practice,  
quality and the impact of  
vertical placements on children

**National Children's Bureau: working with children, for children**

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Front cover image courtesy of the Northern Ireland Childminding Association. For more information on this research project please contact Teresa Geraghty (Senior Research and Development Officer) at [TGeraghty@ncb.org.uk](mailto:TGeraghty@ncb.org.uk) or Rachel Shannon (Research Officer) at [RShannon@ncb.org.uk](mailto:RShannon@ncb.org.uk). Alternatively, please call the office of the National Children's Bureau Northern Ireland on 028 9089 1730.

## Background

This research represents the first ever study of childminding practice in Northern Ireland which looks in detail at issues such as quality in childminding practice and the benefits and challenges of vertical grouping (i.e. children of different ages being cared for together). The study also provides a profile of childminders in terms of age, gender, qualifications held and access to training and support.

This study had two overall aims, namely:

- To explore issues of practice and quality within childminding in Northern Ireland.
- To ascertain the impacts on children of vertical grouping.

## Methodology

The methodology comprised the following activities:

- A literature review on the issues of quality in childminding practice and the impact of vertical/mixed age placements on children;
- Postal self-completion surveys with 230 randomly selected childminders and 261 parents;
- A total of nine focus group discussions with 49 childminders, 4 focus groups and a telephone interview with 16 parents across all 5 of the Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) areas;
- Interviews with 14 children, aged 4-11 years and;
- The completion of questions asked on behalf of NCB NI in the Kids Life and Times (KLT) survey by 3773 Year 7 pupils.

## **Key findings, conclusions and recommendations**

In addressing the study's specific objectives, the findings relating to each have been summarised under the following key headings:

### **Features of childminding practice**

- Objective 1 - What does childminding practice in Northern Ireland look like?

### **Quality in childminding practice**

- Objective 2 - From the perspectives of childminders, parents and children, what does quality look like and how does it manifest itself in childminding practice?
- Objective 3 - What would help to enhance the quality of childminding practice from the perspectives of childminders and parents?
- Objective 4 - To what extent do specific childcare qualifications matter to both parents and childminders in terms of their views on quality and practice?

### **Vertical grouping in childminding practice**

- Objective 5 - What is the impact of vertical grouping on children from the perspectives of childminders, parents and children themselves?
- Objective 6 - What are the challenges to providing and using vertical grouping?
- Objective 7 - To what extent are the impacts of vertical grouping an influencing factor in motivating parents to choose childminding over other forms of day care?

### **Support and development of childminding practice**

- Objective 8 - What are the benefits of having specific childcare qualifications for childminders?
- Objective 9 - What are the barriers to achieving specific childcare qualifications for childminders?
- Objective 10 - Does Quality First Accreditation (from NICMA) benefit childminders? If so, how? If not, why not?

Using the headings above, the remainder of this summary presents the key findings of the research, the resultant conclusions that can be drawn from these and recommendations for improving childminding practice, including implications for relevant policy development.

A copy of the full report and appendices can be downloaded from the websites of NCB NI<sup>1</sup> (National Children's Bureau NI), OFMDFM (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister) and NICMA (Northern Ireland Childminding Association).

## Profile of childminders

### Summary of key findings

- The research found that there is no typical childminder in Northern Ireland. Whilst the majority are white females, they vary in terms of age and religion, experience and qualifications held.
- With the exception of those qualified at diploma/degree level, childminders in this research are better qualified than the general population. They are also less likely to have no qualifications than the general population - 16% have no general qualifications compared to 29% in the most recent census (NI Census, 2011). Older childminders (aged 61+) tend to be more likely not to have any qualifications following the trend in the general population (NI Census, 2011).
- Childminders in Northern Ireland are not required to hold any specific childcare qualifications but over half of those participating in this research do. Again, older childminders are much less likely to hold childcare qualifications. Childminders in the Belfast HSCT area are more likely to have no childcare qualifications compared to those based in the Western HSCT.
- Childminders in Northern Ireland are very experienced with almost two-thirds of research participants having more than 4 years experience as a childminder. Half have experience of working in another early years or educational setting prior to becoming a childminder.
- On average, childminders in this study are being paid to look after 4 children from 3 different families. As childminders generally are registered to care for 6 children, this suggests that, on average, childminders have 2 free places to fill (although

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ncb.org.uk/who-we-are/northern-ireland/publications>

childminders' own children may be taking up these places). 11% of childminders surveyed provide care for children with special needs.

- Many childminders work on average 7.3 hours per week day. One-third of those surveyed work later than 6pm, two-thirds before 8am and 12% provide care overnight.

## Conclusions

- Childminders in this research have demonstrated that childminding is a purposeful and permanent career choice and is not a short-term or temporary job.
- Although there is no obligation on childminders to hold *specific childcare qualifications*, more than half do, which is evidence of their dedication and commitment to a chosen profession and career path.
- However, there are gaps in relation to the holding of qualifications, particularly for older childminders. They may be very experienced but they may also be missing out on new developments regarding caring for children, which could have an impact on their work.
- A relatively high proportion of childminders care for children with special needs. Such childminders may require specialised training on specific conditions in order to fully meet the needs of the children they care for.

## Features of childminding practice

### Summary of key findings

- Childminders in this research had more mixed views than McGaha et al., (2011) and Child Action Inc (undated) in relation to planning. Some indicated that it was an important element of childminding practice. However, many felt that planning needed to be flexible to meet the needs of children, cope with the demands of the weather, accommodate older children's routines (e.g. school collections) and facilitate free play and child-led activities.



- Childminders reported that children in their care were involved in a wide range of activities to stimulate various development areas. The most common of these were gross motor skills activities, activities that develop language skills, early literacy, numeracy and cognitive abilities, creative activities and imaginary play.
- In the interviews and Kids Life and Times (KLT) survey children expressed their enjoyment and happiness in participating in a wide range of activities at their childminders. These activities included baking, watching TV and playing computer games. Notably, children were more likely to report watching TV in a childminding setting than in an after-schools club.
- Many children enjoyed playing outside at their childminders. Key outdoor activities included football and playing with garden toys (e.g. trampolines).
- Completing homework also featured prominently for school-going children in the KLT survey and interviews as an activity undertaken at their childminders.
- Childminders supplemented children's experience to aid their development by using low-cost or no-cost facilities outside of their home when caring for children, including local parks, playgrounds and libraries.
- Childminders valued free play and reported incorporating early education and learning into their practice through the provision of free play. Free play was also seen as beneficial in encouraging and enabling children's imagination.
- For the most part both parents and childminders believed that their role involved providing both care and early education. Childminders stressed that caring and educating are interdependent aspects of their role.

## Conclusions

- The degree to which childminders reported planning daily activities, the range of activities they indicated undertaking and their reported use of other facilities, such as libraries and parks, to engage children, suggests that childminding practice is an intentional effort to help develop children's abilities, skills and capacities.
- Childminders' role as both carers and co-educators with parents clearly suggests that childminders are working in line with recommendations from the Nutbrown Review (2012), which stressed the importance of facilitating learning in an early years setting, and are also supporting the educational development of school-aged children.

- Given the dependence on local amenities, any future and recent cutbacks (including those that have resulted in library closures) may have a detrimental impact on both childminders and the children in their care.
- In order to facilitate free play, childminders require access to a wide range of resources or the use of open-ended resources (e.g. art and craft materials). Lack of, or limited access to, such resources (as well as a lack of knowledge of how to use them) may mean, that some children being cared for by a childminder are less likely to participate in, and benefit from, free play.

### Policy and practice recommendations

These findings provide a clear message to policy makers about the important role childminders can play in the early education of children. Current and future opportunities targeting young children's development, such as the Get Involved in Your Child's Education programme from the Department of Education (DE), should acknowledge this role and be extended to include other significant adults in a child's life, such as childminders.

1. We recommend that the Department of Education initiates a public education campaign aimed at parents to raise their awareness, and recognise the potential value, of the everyday early education development that happens in a childminding setting. Parents need to be more aware that children can learn valuable skills at home and at their childminders *before* their formal education begins. This could be achieved through the distribution of leaflets, posters and billboards in public places such as doctors' surgeries, libraries, public transport spaces and pre-school settings.
2. Childminders should be trained to work with open ended resources in order to facilitate free play more effectively in their settings.

### Quality in childminding practice

#### Summary of key findings

- Quality in a childminding setting is a multi-faceted concept comprising of the provision of a safe physical environment, childminder-child and childminder-parent interactions, flexibility, and childminders' adherence to policy and procedures (including the inspection process). In the focus groups, childminders were more



likely to state that the relationship they have with a parent is fundamental to providing a high quality service and parents were more likely to point towards the physical setting offered by a childminder and the child-centred elements of their practice.

- Childcare training and qualifications are not of primary importance to parents and childminders in regards to the quality of childminding practice, though they were felt to be of benefit in terms of continuous professional development.
- Parents and childminders stated that the quality of care offered in a childminding setting was higher than that offered in other childcare settings. The reasons for this included: the unique home-like environment offered; the development of secure attachments and; individualised care and flexibility.
- These findings support the views of Leach (2011) who maintains that the 'ordinaryness' of the home environment and its everyday activities has a bigger positive impact on children compared to more structured settings. Leach (2011) attributes this impact to secure attachments between the childminder and child, and there was evidence of these attachments in childminders' settings.
- Parents' primary reason for choosing childminding over other forms of childcare was the homely environment offered.
- It was felt that childminders do not hold the same professional status as other childcare professionals. Reasons for these views included: childminders are viewed as 'stay at home mums'; childminding is considered an easy job; childminders are not required to hold any specific childcare training or qualifications and; the existence of unregistered childminders undermines the professionalism of childminding.

## Conclusions

- More reflective practice can be encouraged through specific childcare training which may in turn raise the quality of care provided.
- The lack of mandatory specific childcare qualifications for childminders is a barrier to raising the status of registered childminding and the existence of unregistered childminders undermines attempts by registered childminders to prove the quality of their work to the general public.

## Policy and practice recommendations

1. These findings suggest that more needs to be done to raise the profile and status of childminding, in particular around the professional aspects of the role and the care features that are associated with high quality in a childminding setting, e.g. the homely environment, the experienced workforce, personal relationships and the child-centred flexible approach.
2. In order to enhance the profile and status of childminding, the Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety (DHSSPS), the HSCTs and associated relevant structures such as Childcare Partnerships and voluntary sector organisations such as NICMA, need to raise public awareness of:
  - a. the high quality of care offered in a childminding setting
  - b. the prevalence of childcare qualifications amongst childminders in Northern Ireland
  - c. the high level of experience held by childminders (65% have more than 4 years childminding experience)
  - d. the range of activities childminders provide that contribute to children's learning and development
  - e. the homely environment of the setting and the potential for secure attachments being formed between the child and childminder.
3. Greater support also needs to be given to childminders by the HSCTs, NICMA and the Childcare Partnerships in managing their relationships with parents so that the benefits for children of being in a mixed age setting are optimised.
4. We recommend that the HSCTs make inspection reports available online to ensure greater transparency and so that parents can make an informed decision regarding their choice of childcare.
5. Given the introduction of the Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day Care (DHSSPS, 2012) during the course of this research and its aim of raising the quality of care provided to children, we recommend that the impact of the Standards is evaluated across the full range of childcare settings in Northern Ireland.
6. The forthcoming childcare strategy is due later in 2014 and needs to take account of this research, its findings, conclusions, policy implications and recommendations. Childminding, as it provides the greatest number of childcare places in Northern

Ireland, needs to be more explicitly recognised in this strategy.

## Benefits and challenges of vertical grouping

### Summary of key findings

- Parents, childminders and children identified many benefits associated with vertical grouping.
- One of the main benefits was the promotion of learning, with a majority of childminders (98%) and parents (97%) stating that children learn a lot from older children. These views on the promotion of learning in mixed age placements were echoed in the focus groups.
- A high proportion (88%) of both parents and childminders noted that mixed age settings have a family feel more commonly associated with a home and children benefit from this natural environment. Linked to this, children noted that they liked spending time with siblings at their childminders.
- Older children acting as positive role models, the development of social skills such as patience, empathy and leadership, and the promotion of mixed age friendships were all additional benefits of mixed age settings identified by the respondents.
- In the survey findings, childminders were more likely than parents to identify challenges associated with mixed age placements.
- One of these challenges involved the logistics of catering for the needs of different age groups, i.e. scheduling younger children's nap times around school pick-ups (43% of childminders identified this as a challenge compared to 22% of parents).
- Not having enough resources to meet the needs of different age groups was another challenge more likely to be identified in the survey findings by childminders (36%) than parents (9%). However, in the focus groups and interviews this issue was raised by all groups of respondents, including children.
- There were mixed views from childminders and parents on behavioural challenges of mixed age settings.

- Childminders identified the challenge of older children being domineering of younger children and childminders were more likely (24%) to identify the challenge of older children becoming more babyish as a result of being around younger children compared to parents (7%) in the survey findings. In addition, childminders and children were more likely to note that younger children can disrupt the activities of older children.
- Although behavioural issues, such as older children bullying and being too rough around younger children, were identified only by a small proportion of childminders and parents in the survey findings, in the focus groups some respondents did express concerns about older children exposing younger children to age inappropriate activities (e.g. electronic games/devices).
- Solutions to the challenges of vertical grouping included improved planning and having access to a wide variety of resources and activities. Some childminders' views echoed those of Child Action Inc (undated) when discussing the importance of planning when caring for children of mixed ages.
- Overall, the benefits of mixed age settings were seen to outweigh the challenges because they are similar to a home setting, they promote learning and the development of social skills, different age groups (including siblings) can enjoy being together and there is less pressure for children to conform to age expected 'norms'.
- Childminders (91%) and parents (90%) also felt that children learn from participating in everyday activities with their childminder.

## Conclusions

- All participants (adults and children) in this research could readily identify several benefits of vertical grouping. However, challenges of vertical grouping are more readily identified by childminders and children than by parents. This is possibly because childminders and children experience firsthand both challenges and benefits whereas parents are not physically present in the childminding setting. There is a consensus among parents and childminders that the perceived benefits of vertical grouping far outweigh the associated challenges and drawbacks.
- Childminders may need to be provided with more support in order to mitigate the challenges of vertical grouping so that the benefits can be maximised for the children in their care.

## Policy and practice recommendations

1. These findings show children benefit from being cared for in mixed age settings. As vertical grouping is a characteristic unique to childminding settings, the public awareness campaign mentioned previously should also include this unique feature of childminding. This should focus on the many benefits of vertical grouping identified in this research, for example:
  - a. Opportunities for learning
  - b. Mixed age friendships
  - c. Older children becoming role models
  - d. Development of social skills
  - e. Siblings being cared for together
2. We recommend that in the promotion of childminding as a form of childcare, NICMA should emphasise the benefits of vertical placements to parents.
3. We recommend that current training for childminders provided by NICMA, the Childcare Partnerships and Further Education Colleges incorporates content which specifically attempts to overcome the challenges of vertical grouping, for example, by recommending the use of open-ended resources and activities and weekly planners.
4. As some older children reported experiencing loneliness and boredom as a result of being cared for in a mixed age setting, we recommend that childminders are encouraged to include and listen to the voices of these children in the development of their weekly planners and associated activities.

## Support and development of childminding practice

### Summary of key findings

- Childminders main sources of childcare training were the HSCT Teams and NICMA and many of the childminders had taken up training opportunities.

- One fifth of childminders had not accessed childcare training and discrepancies were identified according to geography and age. Childminders from the Northern HSCT and those aged 61+ were more likely not to have accessed childcare training.
- The main barriers which prevented childminders from accessing childcare training were scheduling, location and cost.
- Childminders identified a range of sources of support, e.g. peer support, NICMA and Early Years Teams from the HSCTs.
- While peer support was important to many childminders, membership of childminding networks and support groups was low which suggests that many childminders engage with their peers informally for support. Childminders identified confidentiality concerns and poor governance as key barriers to their involvement in childminding support groups and networks.
- Overall, childminders were satisfied with the practice support and advice that they had received.
- Addressing unregistered childminding was considered a key way to enhance childminding practice in Northern Ireland. Actions identified to address this issue included a public education campaign aimed at parents and a greater enforcement of the law.
- Awareness of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was low amongst childminders. Those that were aware of EYFS had mixed opinions about the introduction of an equivalent set of standards for early childcare providers in Northern Ireland, with 21% stating that it should be introduced and 27% stating that it should not.
- These findings and reactions to the idea of a set of standards similar to EYFS reflect the debate in the literature about the education-care divide/continuum within early years provision as outlined by Lindon (2006), Adams and Adams (2011) and Laing (2011).

## Conclusions

- The large proportion of childminders accessing childcare training is an indication of the interest childminders have in their profession. However, some barriers associated with accessing training seem insurmountable for childminders which may prevent a significant minority furthering their career. Some 11% of childminders



care for children with special needs and therefore it is crucial that they are equipped to meet these specific needs. However, the lack of specific childcare qualifications and lack of take up of training opportunities among some childminders raises concerns that some childminders may be caring for children with special needs without having appropriate skills and knowledge.

- The high level of satisfaction among childminders for support received is encouraging to those in the HSCTs and NICMA and is an endorsement of the quality of peer support among childminders in Northern Ireland.
- However, the isolation felt by some childminders (and especially non-NICMA members) suggests that more could be done to enhance support for all childminders in Northern Ireland.
- NICMA's Quality First Accreditation has been of benefit to childminders in terms of giving parents confidence in their practice and providing the childminders with new ideas.

### **Policy and practice recommendations**

1. While the actions outlined by Bright Start, i.e. the development of the childcare workforce, are to be welcomed, if these are to be achieved there is a need for cross-departmental cooperation where DHSSPS, DE and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) act together in terms of the development of childcare and early education practice and for the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) to be involved in workforce development. The development of the workforce within childminding needs to be adequately and appropriately resourced with relevant and accessible training, addressing the barriers identified in this research. We recommend that OFMDFM ring fence funding for this purpose.
2. Training providers should explore the provision of modules/units in specific areas as well as full courses leading to qualifications.
3. As previously mentioned, it is vital that current training that exists for childminders incorporates content which specifically attempts to overcome the challenges of vertical grouping. The Childcare Partnerships should devise a training course focusing on this aspect of childminding practice. This course should:
  - a. Include definitions of vertical grouping.
  - b. Highlight the benefits of vertical grouping which include the promotion of learning, the homely feel of a mixed age setting, positive role models, the

development of social skills and the promotion of mixed age friendships.

- c. Highlight the challenges of vertical grouping which include logistical issues when caring for different age groups, not having enough resources to meet the needs of different age groups and behavioural challenges such as older children becoming more babyish around younger children and younger children disrupting the activities of older children.
  - d. Identify solutions to the challenges of vertical grouping, such as improved planning, open-ended resources and activities.
4. Training for new and existing childminders should emphasise what quality in childminding practice looks like and how best to achieve this.
  5. The status of childminding and indeed childminding practice is likely to improve through a higher proportion of childminders completing specific childcare training and qualifications. However, training providers need to take greater cognisance of the barriers identified in this research to childminders accessing training. For example, training by all providers should be organised at a time that is convenient to childminders (i.e. after 7pm or on weekends) and an appropriate number of spaces must be made available. These barriers need to be addressed if the key first actions of the Bright Start programme are to be achieved, i.e. the development of the childcare workforce.
  6. As childminders would be unwilling to charge more for having higher qualifications, for fear of losing business, other incentives need to be considered if they are to be encouraged to develop professionally. For example, free or discounted training, vouchers for free play resources, discounts on insurance.
  7. Older childminders need to be encouraged and incentivised to take up training opportunities, perhaps by involving them in the provision of training so that they can share their vast experience with their younger peers. This could be done through a buddy system where new childminders are linked with more experienced childminders who can act as a mentor.
  8. In order to encourage a higher uptake of childcare qualifications amongst childminders, we recommend that training providers and support organisations provide a platform for qualified childminders to share their experiences of completing qualifications and how they have incorporated this learning into their practice effectively. We recommend that these knowledge sharing opportunities take place at information sessions for prospective childminders, at the NICMA AGM and as part of childminding training programmes and support groups.

9. Childminders who are caring for children with special needs need to have access to appropriate training in order to meet these children's specific needs.
10. We welcome the intention to have an advertising campaign within the Bright Start action plan to promote the benefits of registered childcare to parents. However, we also recommend that there should be an education campaign led by the DHSSPS, HSCTs, the Childcare Partnerships and NICMA in relation to childminding aimed at the following:
  - a. Current and prospective unregistered childminders – to highlight the fact that such practice is illegal and to reinforce the benefits of being registered.
  - b. The general public – to highlight the professionalism of childminding, what it entails and communicate the quality features of childminding practice.
11. We recommend that there should be more robust enforcement of the law regarding unregistered childminding by the DHSSPS and HSCTs.
12. Despite childminders' membership of support groups being low, there is evidence to suggest that childminders do see value in participating in these networks (i.e. opportunity to share good practice and support networks can help reduce isolation). We recommend that NICMA and the Childcare Partnerships address the barriers identified in the research to childminders' participation in these groups. For example, NICMA and non-NICMA members should be offered guidance in establishing and running support groups with the assistance of support workers from NICMA and the Childcare Partnerships.
13. A high proportion of childminders who completed the NICMA Quality First Accreditation found this course of benefit. We recommend that NICMA promote the benefits identified in the research of undertaking this course. For example, it gave parents confidence in childminders' practice and provided childminders with new ideas.
14. We recommend that NICMA consider offering different levels of membership, for example, 'comprehensive membership' might cover insurance and support, whereas 'basic level' membership might cover support needs only. This may enable those childminders who do not wish to purchase insurance from NICMA to still access support in order to develop their practice.

## Summary of recommendations

To summarise, our recommendations arising from this study are as follows:

1. We recommend that the Department of Education initiates a public education campaign aimed at parents to raise their awareness, and recognise the potential value, of the everyday early education development that happens in a childminding setting.
2. Childminders should be trained to work with open ended resources in order to facilitate free play more effectively in their settings.
3. The DHSSPS, the HSCTs and associated relevant structures such as Childcare Partnerships and voluntary sector organisations such as NICMA, need to raise public awareness of the professional aspects of the role and the care features associated with high quality in a childminding setting, as identified in this research.
4. Greater support needs to be given to childminders by the HSCTs, NICMA and the Childcare Partnerships in managing their relationships with parents so that the benefits for children of being in a mixed age setting are optimised.
5. We recommend that the HSCTs make inspection reports available online to ensure greater transparency and to allow parents to make an informed decision regarding their choice of childcare.
6. We recommend that the impact of the Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day Care (DHSSPS, 2012) is evaluated across the full range of childcare settings in Northern Ireland.
7. The forthcoming childcare strategy needs to take account of this research, its findings, conclusions, policy implications and recommendations. Childminding, as it provides the greatest number of childcare places in Northern Ireland, needs to be explicitly recognised in this strategy.
8. As vertical grouping is a characteristic unique to childminding settings, the public awareness campaign mentioned in recommendation 3 should also include this unique feature of childminding. This should focus on the many benefits of vertical grouping identified in this research.
9. We recommend that in the promotion of childminding as a form of childcare, NICMA should emphasise the benefits of vertical placements to parents.

10. We recommend that current training for childminders provided by NICMA, the Childcare Partnerships and Further Education Colleges incorporates content which specifically attempts to overcome the challenges of vertical grouping.
11. As some older children reported experiencing loneliness and boredom as a result of being cared for in a mixed age setting, we recommend that childminders are encouraged to include and listen to the voices of these children in the development of their weekly planners and associated activities.
12. We recommend cross-departmental cooperation where DHSSPS, DE and OFMDFM act together in terms of the development of childcare and early education practice and for DEL to be involved in workforce development. The development of the workforce within childminding needs to be adequately and appropriately resourced with relevant and accessible training, addressing the barriers identified in this research. We recommend that OFMDFM ring fence funding for this purpose.
13. Training providers should explore the provision of modules/units in specific areas as well as full courses leading to qualifications.
14. It is vital that current training that exists for childminders incorporates content which specifically attempts to overcome the challenges of vertical grouping. The Childcare Partnerships should devise a training course focusing on this aspect of childminding practice.
15. Training for new and existing childminders should emphasise what quality in childminding practice looks like and how best to achieve this.
16. Training providers need to take greater cognisance of the barriers identified in this research to childminders accessing training.
17. As childminders would be unwilling to charge more for having higher qualifications, for fear of losing business, other incentives need to be considered if they are to be encouraged to develop professionally.
18. Older childminders need to be encouraged and incentivised to take up training opportunities, perhaps by involving them in the provision of training so that they can share their vast experience with their younger peers.
19. We recommend that training providers and support organisations provide a platform for qualified childminders to share their experiences of completing qualifications and how they have incorporated this learning into their practice effectively.

20. Childminders who are caring for children with special needs need to have access to appropriate training in order to meet these children's specific needs.
21. We welcome the intention to have an advertising campaign within the Bright Start action plan to promote the benefits of registered childcare to parents. However, we also recommend that there should be an education campaign led by the DHSSPS, HSCTs, the Childcare Partnerships and NICMA in relation to childminding aimed at the following:
  - a. Current and prospective unregistered childminders – to highlight the fact that such practice is illegal and to reinforce the benefits of being registered.
  - b. The general public – to highlight the professionalism of childminding, what it entails and communicate the quality features of childminding practice.
22. We recommend that there should be more robust enforcement of the law regarding unregistered childminding by the DHSSPS and HSCTs.
23. We recommend that NICMA and the Childcare Partnerships address the barriers identified in the research to childminders' participation in support groups.
24. We recommend that NICMA promote the benefits identified in the research of undertaking the Quality First Accreditation.
25. We recommend that NICMA consider offering different levels of membership, for example, 'comprehensive membership' might cover insurance and support, whereas 'basic level' membership might cover support needs only.