

**Draft**  
**Childminding Action Plan**

**August 2019**

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
1. Context.....	13
1.1 Definition of childminding .....	13
1.2 Benefits of childminding .....	15
1.3 The childminding sector in Ireland.....	19
1.4 Childminding in other jurisdictions.....	22
1.5 Development of the Action Plan .....	25
2. Aims and objectives.....	27
2.1 Aims.....	27
2.2 Objectives .....	28
2.3 Timing: urgency and caution.....	28
3. Areas of action .....	30
3.1 Regulatory change .....	30
3.2 Qualifications and training .....	32
3.3 Quality supports.....	38
3.4 Funding and financial supports.....	44
4. Costs.....	48
4.1 Direct costs .....	49
4.2 Indirect costs.....	52
4.3 Offsetting savings .....	52
4.4 Total net costs.....	53
5. Implementation .....	55
5.1 Timeline.....	55
5.2 Consultation and communications.....	56
5.3 Oversight and delivery.....	57
Annex: Working Group report – Summary of Proposals .....	59

# Executive Summary

Childminding offers many benefits to children and parents but currently receives little formal recognition by the State. While centre-based early learning and care services have evolved rapidly in the last 20 years in policy terms, childminding has remained at the margins of funding, support and regulation, in spite of its many advantages and its continued popularity among parents. This Action Plan sets out a 10-year plan for moving childminding into the mainstream of regulation and State support.

## **Benefits of childminding**

Childminders play a **central role in provision** of both early learning and care and school-age childcare in Ireland. For many children in Ireland, a childminder is their main carer other than their parents, often starting in their early childhood and continuing into their school years. A childminder can be a cherished and constant figure in a child's life – almost a second family.

The research evidence points to **positive outcomes for children** of quality childminding, which may be linked to consistency of carer and a low child-adult ratio. While quality centre-based provision also offers distinctive benefits in terms of quality, including greater scope for teamwork and leadership, the similar evidence on outcomes for children makes a strong case for giving parents choice of provider-type and continuing to raise standards across the board.

Childminders are **highly valued by many parents** – particularly for under-3s and for school-age children – because of the home-from-home setting, their strong and lasting relationships, and the flexibility they can offer, including catering for mixed age groups including siblings. For some parents, childminding is the only option as they live in areas where centre-based care is not available or the opening hours do not match their childcare needs.

Extending regulation to childminders enables them to have greater access to Government supports – both subsidies that can reduce parents' fees and supports to assist childminders to offer an on-going quality service to children. Increasing the options for parents in terms of accessible, affordable and high quality early learning and care and school-age childcare can **support increased labour market participation**. In particular, childminders sometimes offer greater flexibility and responsiveness for parents, fitting around parents' working hours. Childminding also offers an effective solution to issues of supply and access, with **little capital investment** required, and economic viability even in remote rural areas.

In spite of its many benefits, however, childminding in Ireland is almost entirely unregulated and in some ways invisible. The number of childminders is unknown and can only be estimated. Few are registered with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency – most are exempt, preventing them from registering as the current regulations allow only those minding seven or more children (or four or more pre-school children) in the childminder's home to register with Tusla. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many childminders work in the informal economy. The lack of regulation means a lack of quality assurance for children or parents and potential risk, without even a requirement for Garda vetting checks. It means that parents who want to use a childminder have no access to public subsidy, and as many childminders operate in the informal economy they can be hard for parents to find. The lack of regulation also limits childminders' scope for professional development, preventing their access to funded training or to supports for quality.

## Aims and objectives

The overall objective of this Action Plan is to improve access to high quality and affordable early learning and care and school-age childcare through childminding. To do this, the action plan sets out an incremental and supportive pathway to regulation. This will enable more childminders to access Government subsidies, making their services more affordable to parents. It will also enable them to access a variety of supports to assist them in meeting regulatory and quality requirements.

In achieving this overall objective, the Action Plan will contribute to the following aims:

- Support **parental choice regarding type** of provider of early learning and care and school-age childcare.
- Increase access to **affordable** early learning and care and school-age childcare.
- Increase the **availability of places** for early learning and care, especially for under-3s, and for school-age childcare.
- Offer more **flexibility** for parents who work irregular hours.
- Support **labour market participation for all parents, including those** who live in areas with low population density.
- Improve the **quality** of provision of early learning and care and school-age childcare, thus supporting **child development and educational outcomes**.
- Provide greater formal **recognition** for childminders and support their **professional development**.

Within the overall objective of bringing childminders into the mainstream of regulation and supports, the Action Plan has a number of specific objectives:

1. Enable a far greater number of parents who use childminders to benefit from **subsidies under the National Childcare Scheme**.
2. Support quality assurance of childminders and safeguarding of children through **extending the scope of regulation and inspection** to all paid, non-relative childminders.
3. Provide greater recognition of childminders and **tailor childminder regulations and inspection processes to reflect the home environment** in which childminders work and the informal routes by which childminders often enter the sector.
4. Develop bespoke resources to **support the quality of childminding** provision, including through the development of **staffed local networks** to provide professional development and peer support, offering also the possibility of a new partnership relationship between childminders and centre-based services.
5. Open up **financial supports and training** opportunities for childminders including an **expanded Learner Fund** to assist childminders to meet qualification requirements and to provide a continuous professional development system.
6. Provide a **supportive, phased transition process**, to facilitate the largest possible number of childminders to enter the regulated sector, the sphere of quality assurance, and access to Government subsidies, while recognising the time and supports required for this reform.

## Development of the Action Plan

The Childminding Action Plan sets out a pathway to achieving Government commitments:

- *First 5*, the Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and Families, published in November 2018, commits to:

- Promote and support the registration of paid, non-relative childminders currently eligible to register with Tusla in preparation for the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme.
- Extend regulation to all other paid, non-relative childminders on a phased basis over the lifetime of the Strategy, building on the 2018 Working Group report. This will make National Childcare Scheme subsidies available to more parents who use childminding services.
- All regulated childminders by 2028 to hold a minimum qualification (level to be determined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs by end 2019).
- Undertake research on the early learning and care (and school-age childcare) needs of parents who work atypical hours or live in rural communities and develop recommendations for future action.
- The Programme for a Partnership Government states:
  - ‘We recognise the value of informal childcare for families and support the development of a phased programme of reforms for childminders making it easier to support both families and childminders.’
- Publication of a Childminding Action Plan is also a commitment in *Future Jobs Ireland* and is a specific deliverable under the ‘Increasing Participation in the Labour Force’ pillar of *Future Jobs Ireland 2019*:
  - ‘Publish a Childminding Action Plan to give parents greater access to subsidised home-based Early Learning and Care.’

This Childminding Action Plan draws heavily on the report of the Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector, which was established by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in 2016 and which published its recommendations in spring 2018 (called the ‘Working Group report’ here).<sup>1</sup> The Group’s work is gratefully acknowledged.

In scope, the Action Plan mainly addresses self-employed childminders who work in their own homes, and who are comparable to centre-based providers in offering a service that may be open to the public (which therefore requires regulation and quality assurance) though different in scale and in setting. The Action Plan is not primarily concerned with childminders or nannies who work in the child’s home, and who are employees of the child’s parents, nor is the Action Plan primarily concerned with au pairs. The Action Plan does, however, include an action to develop information / training resources in relation to the use of nannies and au pairs.

### **A phased transition**

While there has long been a need for an action plan for childminding, the imminent introduction of **the National Childcare Scheme creates both an opportunity and an urgency** to act now. The National Childcare Scheme will provide Government subsidies towards the cost of Tusla-registered early learning and care and school-age childcare for families on low incomes and to those with net incomes up to a maximum family threshold of €60,000, as well as a universal subsidy for those with children under 3 years old. The new

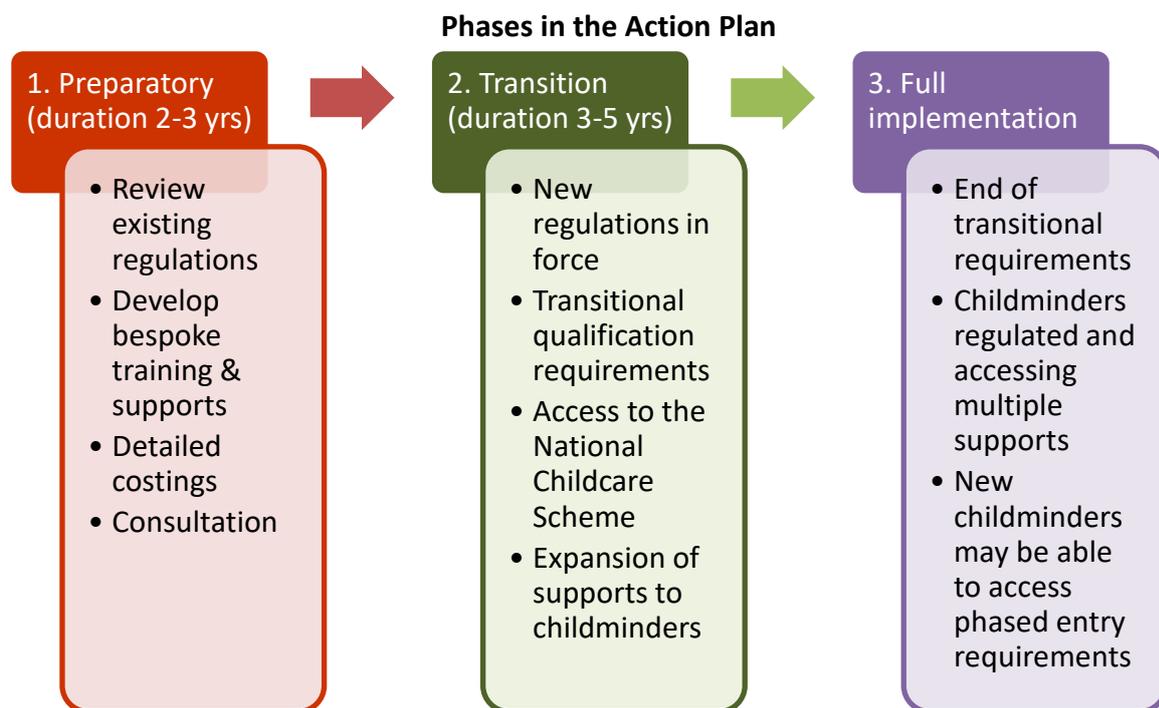
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<sup>1</sup> Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector (2018) *Pathway to a Quality Support and Assurance System for Childminding: Volume 1*.

scheme aims to make early learning and care and school-age childcare more affordable and accessible.

The prospect of being able to take part in the National Childcare Scheme creates a positive incentive for childminders to register with Tusla, giving them – and the parents who choose to use childminders – an opportunity that has not previously existed to access subsidies. Furthermore, if action is not taken now to extend the possibility of registration to childminders then some families who will be eligible for significant subsidies under the National Childcare Scheme may switch to centre-based childcare, creating a risk that a number childminders may be put out of business. This would significantly reduce parental choice and limit access to affordable options for early learning and care and school-age childcare.

While the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme creates some urgency, there is also a **need for caution**. The proposed action plan includes significant change for childminders. **It is critical that as many childminders as possible are supported to make the transition to the new era of regulation and to be able to access subsidies for families using their services. Given the large scale of reforms** involved, with thousands of childminders expected to move into the scope of regulation and the formal economy, and the need to build the infrastructure to support the reforms, the Action Plan necessarily involves a phased approach over the lifetime of *First 5* (to 2028), described below and summarised in the table.



**Phase 1: Preparatory – Consultation, research and development. (Duration 2-3 years.)** 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. In particular, Phase 1 will involve developing regulations specific and appropriate to childminders, which will come into effect in Phase 2. As the new regulations will not yet be in effect, the current regulations – and legal exemptions from regulation of most childminders – will remain in place during Phase 1.

Phase 1 is expected to last 2-3 years, but its duration will depend on more detailed costing and budget availability.

Phase 1 will include:

- Supporting **registration** with Tusla of the limited number of childminders who fall within the scope of the current regulations or who could do so in the short-term (those minding seven or more children of any age, or four or more pre-school children), thereby enabling more childminders and parents to benefit in the short-term from subsidies that will become available under the National Childcare Scheme.
- **Research** into the number of childminders expected to be legally required to register with Tusla in Phase 2 and who will remain in the sector. Research into the cost for childminders to deliver their services. Preparation of cost estimates of Phase 2 reforms on this basis, including the cost of additional families accessing National Childcare Scheme subsidies through childminders.
- Public **consultation** on the draft Action Plan and completion of final plan for the approval of Government.
- Consultation on new **Regulations** (both pre-school and school-age) and an associated **inspection process** from the perspective of childminders to ensure that the Regulations are proportionate and appropriate to the home and family setting in which childminders work.
- **Amendment of the Child Care Act 1991** (with the amendment to come into force at the beginning of Phase 2) to allow for the regulation of childminders who are currently excluded from regulation.
- Review and development of bespoke **training and qualifications** for childminders and for local childminder coordinator roles (to be completed in conjunction with the Workforce Development Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, being led by DCYA.)
- Identify and cost reforms to **quality** and **financial supports** for childminders, including research into staffed local childminding networks.
- Develop a **communications** strategy to ensure childminders and parents are aware of the benefits of the reforms and the nature of the changes involved.

### **Phase 2: Transition phase. (Duration 3-5 years.)**

Phase 2 will be a transition phase in which a significantly increased number of childminders will be able to register with Tusla and take part in State funding schemes, while benefiting from training and supports to progressively meet regulatory requirements and build the foundations of quality and professional development. During this transition phase, the regulatory requirements – particularly requirements for training / qualifications – will be less onerous than full regulation in Phase 3.

Phase 2, which is expected to last between 3 and 5 years, will commence when the current legal exemptions from regulation are ended and new childminder-specific regulations come into force. The timing of this change will be budget-dependent and subject to agreement with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, given the likely increase in the cost of the National Childcare Scheme due to a significant number of additional families benefiting, and the cost of additional registration / inspection and professional development resources.

Phase 2 will include:

- Ending of the legal exclusion from regulation for certain childminders, and the coming into force of any necessary changes to the **Regulations** that are specific to childminders.
- Introduction of **new training and qualification requirements** for childminders as part of the new Regulations, which may involve transitional arrangements.<sup>2</sup>
- Eligibility to take part in the **National Childcare Scheme**, for any childminder who meets the registration requirements introduced during this transition phase.
- Expansion of Tusla **inspection services** to allow for registration and an inspection model for childminders.
- Development of **supports for quality improvement and training** for childminders, including piloting and potential introduction of staffed local childminding networks led by qualified network leaders (graduate-level, with specific training), coordinated nationally by Better Start.
- Potential reform of **financial supports** for childminders (e.g. possible changes to the Childminding Development Grant).
- **Communications** actions to inform childminders and parents about new regulations and available supports.

### **Phase 3: Full implementation phase**

Phase 3 will involve regulatory requirements coming fully into force. Phase 3 will begin between 5 and 8 years after the beginning of the Action Plan, with the precise date to be estimated in Phase 1 during development of regulations and planning of the timeline for transition to full regulatory requirements. In Phase 3, childminding will be fully mainstreamed into all quality and funding infrastructure for early learning and care and for school-age childcare.

Phase 3 will include:

- Full **training and qualification requirements**, with the final requirements to be set out in the new childminder-specific regulations developed in Phase 1.
- Full implementation phase in which childminders are included across the full range of quality and funding supports, with completion of reforms to the quality development infrastructure.
- Support the wider aim of a graduate-led workforce through progressive roll-out of **staffed local childminding networks** led by network leaders with graduate-level qualifications (as well as specific training), coordinated nationally by Better Start.
- New entrants to a career as a childminder may have access to phased entry requirements.

### **Costs**

Costing this Action Plan is challenging given considerable uncertainty about the number of childminders working in the country, and even less certainty about the number of childminders who would choose to work in the sector following the introduction of regulations. This uncertainty impacts on estimates of the number of additional children and families who will be able to access the new National Childcare Scheme subsidies. The cost

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<sup>2</sup> For example, from Phase 2 of the Action Plan it may be permitted for a childminder to register with Tusla – and therefore take part in the National Childcare Scheme – if they have completed a basic training course, provided they go on to achieve a designated qualification within a set period of time.

estimates presented here are therefore purely indicative and would be refined during Phase 1 before the regulatory changes are introduced.

The extension of regulation would give rise to the following types of additional cost that would primarily arise during Phase 2 of the Action Plan:

- Increase in numbers of children and families benefitting from the National Childcare Scheme.
- Expansion of inspection services to carry out the registration and inspection of regulated childminders.
- Extension of the quality development infrastructure and increase in the level of financial support available to childminders, e.g. through the Learner Fund, and Childminder Development Grant.

At the same time, however, there would be offsetting savings, principally through increased labour market participation as a result of wider access to National Childcare Scheme subsidies, and an increase in tax revenues with an expected increase in the number of childminders declaring taxable income to Revenue.

During Phase 1 there would be some additional costs by way of preparation for Phase 2 reforms, including the introduction of training for childminders who may become subject to regulation in Phase 2. It is estimated that Phase 1 costs could be in the region of **€1.8m per annum** in the core scenario, or **€3m per annum** in the higher scenario (which assumes higher-than-expected take-up of a Learner Fund and other training options, preparatory to extension of regulation in Phase 2).

Based on available data and comparison with numbers of registered childminders in other jurisdictions that have already regulated childminders, the core cost estimates presented are based on an assumption that approx. **5,000** childminders would register with Tusla and become eligible for participation in the National Childcare Scheme in Phase 2. In addition, a higher cost scenario is presented in which it is assumed that the number of regulated childminders would rise to approx. **10,000**.

On this basis, it is estimated that the net additional annual cost to the Exchequer of regulating childminders would in Phase 3 of the Action Plan be **€26m per annum**, which would represent a **4.5% increase** in annual public spending on early learning and care and school-age childcare. (In the higher cost scenario, which assumes double the number of registered childminders, the net cost would be €56m per annum.) *First 5* commits to at least doubling investment in Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare by 2028, from the 2018 baseline of €487m. It is envisaged that the cost of regulating childminders would be met from this increase. In addition, the possibility of using EU Structural Funds to support upskilling of the workforce for early learning and care and school-age childcare, including childminders, will be examined.

### **Implementation**

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) will lead on the initial consultation on the draft Action Plan and the preparation of a final Plan for the approval of Government. A **Steering Committee** will then be appointed to oversee implementation of the Action Plan. The Steering Committee will be chaired by DCYA, and will include representation of childminders, parents and other key stakeholders within the early learning and care and school-age childcare sectors.

DCYA recently appointed a **National Childminding Coordinator**, who will support the DCYA Early Years Quality Unit with the implementation of Phase 1 of the Action Plan. The National Childminding Coordinator will be a member of the Steering Committee.

During Phase 1, four **Advisory Groups** will meet, under the auspices of the Steering Committee, and will work with DCYA officials in relation to the following:

- A. *Regulation and Inspection* – content of childminder-specific regulations, including implications of the home environment.
- B. *Qualifications and Training* – qualification requirements for childminders, training, and transition arrangements. (Qualification requirements themselves will be determined within the context of the Workforce Development Plan, and this advisory group will therefore liaise closely with the steering group for the Workforce Development Plan.)
- C. *Funding and Financial Supports* – including review of the Learner Fund and the Childminding Development Grant.
- D. *Consultation and Communications* – to develop a consultation and communications strategy for the Action Plan, including consultation during development of specific actions in Phase 1, communication of reform measures, and information / training resources on the use of nannies and au pairs.

**Communications and consultation**

A significant amount of **consultation** has already been carried out to inform development of this Draft Action Plan, both through the Working Group – which drew on consultations with children, parents and childminders – and through wider consultation processes that informed overall policy direction towards childminding, e.g. the consultations that underpinned *First 5*. But the scale of reform involved in this Action Plan will require further consultation, both initially on the overall approach being proposed and then during development of regulations specific to the home environment.

A significant communications effort will also be required to ensure that childminders, parents and other stakeholders are well informed about the changes being made and the benefits that will accrue.

An Advisory Group on Consultation and Communications will be formed during Phase 1 to support DCYA in the development and implementation of a **consultation and communications strategy**. This Advisory Group and the strategy it will help develop will both support overall communications in relation to the Action Plan, and support other Advisory Groups to ensure that proposals they make (e.g. on regulations and on reform of financial supports) are underpinned by public consultation.

<b>Summary of actions</b>			
	<b>Phase 1 Preparatory Duration 2-3 years</b>	<b>Phase 2 Transition Duration 3-5 years</b>	<b>Phase 3 Full implementation</b>
<b>Cost analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further research and analyse numbers of childminders likely</li> </ul>		

	<p>to come within the scope of regulation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyse likely increase in National Childcare Scheme costs due to higher number of children and families benefiting.</li> <li>• Carry out further cost estimates on Phase 2 and 3 actions (regulation, training, supports).</li> <li>• Complete Regulatory Impact Assessment.</li> </ul>		
<b>Legislation and regulations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Advisory Group on Regulations.</li> <li>• Review Regulations and draft any necessary changes specific to childminders, including public consultation.</li> <li>• Amend the Child Care Act 1991.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End current legal exclusion from regulation of childminders minding 6 or fewer children (and fewer than 4 pre-school children).</li> <li>• Amended Regulations come into force, with lower qualification requirements during transition phase.</li> <li>• Communication actions to raise awareness of the new regulations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full training and qualification requirements in force as part of the regulations.</li> <li>• New childminders establishing a service for the first time may be able to access a phased qualification requirement.</li> </ul>
<b>Qualification and training requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide qualification and training requirements, as part of the Workforce Development Plan.</li> <li>• Establish Advisory Group on Qualifications and Training.</li> <li>• Roll out child safeguarding and first aid training to childminders likely to be subject to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phase in new qualification and training requirements, with initial lower level requirement for duration of Phase 2.</li> <li>• Continue roll-out of child safeguarding and first aid training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full qualification and training requirements.</li> <li>• New childminders establishing a service for the first time may be able to access a phased qualification requirement.</li> <li>• Support wider aim of a graduate-led workforce through childminding</li> </ul>

	regulation in Phase 2.		coordinators with graduate qualifications.
<b>Quality supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore options for childminding supports through existing structures (including Better Start and the inspectorates) and new options (e.g. staffed local childminding networks), linked to review of the operating system for ELC and SAC.</li> <li>• Research staffed local childminding networks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand inspection services.</li> <li>• Extend and reform quality supports for childminders.</li> <li>• Pilot and phased introduction of staffed local childminding networks, depending on outcome of Phase 1 research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide quality supports on an equal footing to childminders and centre-based providers.</li> <li>• Roll out of staffed local childminding networks, potentially linked to roll-out of new funding model for ELC and SAC settings.</li> </ul>
<b>Funding and financial supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Advisory Group on Funding and Financial Supports.</li> <li>• Support childminders who can meet current regulatory requirements to participate in the National Childcare Scheme, including through the Learner Fund.</li> <li>• Review other financial supports.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open National Childcare Scheme to all childminders who meet the transitional regulatory requirements.</li> <li>• Phased reform of other financial supports.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Childcare Scheme open to all childminders who meet regulatory requirements.</li> <li>• Complete reform of other financial supports.</li> </ul>
<b>Consultation and communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Advisory Group on Consultation and Communications.</li> <li>• Develop consultation and communications strategy.</li> <li>• Develop information / training resources on use of nannies and au pairs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement consultation and communications strategy.</li> <li>• Disseminate information / training resources in relation to use of nannies and au pairs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue implementation of consultation and communications strategy.</li> <li>• Disseminate information / training resources in relation to use of nannies and au pairs.</li> </ul>

# 1. Context

Childminders play a **central role in provision** of both early learning and care and school-age childcare in Ireland. For many children in Ireland, a childminder is their main carer other than their parents, often starting in their early childhood and continuing into their school years. A childminder can be a cherished and constant figure in a child's life – almost a second family.

The research evidence points to **positive outcomes for children** of quality childminding, which may be linked to consistency of carer and a low child-adult ratio. While quality centre-based provision also offers distinctive benefits in terms of quality, including greater scope for teamwork and leadership, the similar evidence on outcomes for children makes a strong case for giving parents choice of provider-type and continuing to raise standards across the board.

Childminders are **highly valued by many parents** – particularly for under-3s and for school-age children – because of the home-from-home setting, their strong and lasting relationships, and the flexibility they can offer, including catering for mixed age groups including siblings. For some parents, childminding is the only option as they live in areas where centre-based care is not available or the opening hours do not match their childcare needs.

Extending regulation to childminders enables them to have greater access to Government supports – both subsidies that can reduce parents' fees and supports to assist childminders to offer an on-going quality service to children. Increasing the options for parents in terms of accessible, affordable and high quality early learning and care and school-age childcare can **support increased labour market participation**. In particular, childminders sometimes offer greater flexibility and responsiveness for parents, fitting around parents' working hours. Childminding also offers an effective solution to issues of supply and access, with **little capital investment** required, and economic viability even in remote rural areas.

In spite of its many benefits, however, childminding in Ireland is almost entirely unregulated and in some ways invisible. The number of childminders is unknown and can only be estimated. Few are registered with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency – most are exempt, preventing them from registering as the current regulations allow only those minding seven or more children (or four or more pre-school children) in the childminder's home to register with Tusla. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many childminders work in the informal economy. The lack of regulation means a lack of quality assurance for children or parents and potential risk, without even a requirement for Garda vetting checks. It means that parents who want to use a childminder have no access to public subsidy, and as many childminders operate in the informal economy they can be hard for parents to find. The lack of regulation also limits childminders' scope for professional development, preventing their access to funded training or to supports for quality.

## 1.1 Definition of childminding

Childminding is defined in this Action Plan to mean paid, non-relative care of children aged from birth to 14 (including both early learning and care and school-age childcare) in which children are cared for within the childminder's family setting.

Childminding is sometimes described as ‘**home-based**’ care, as distinguished from ‘centre-based’ care. Centre-based care – especially sessional care – sometimes takes place within a service provider’s home, for example in a purpose-built extension to the home. Such provision, however, differs from childminding both in scale (the number of children), the degree of integration within the childminder’s family life, and the likelihood of mixed age groups:

- **Scale** – Childminders generally work on their own, though they may receive the support of family members. However, many providers of sessional centre-based care in Ireland also operate their service single-handed.<sup>3</sup> The scale of childminding is typically smaller, though, and is constrained by both planning rules and insurance. The Planning and Development Regulations 2001, S.I.600, provide an exemption from planning permission for ‘the activity of minding no more than 6 children, including the children, if any, of the person minding, in the house of that person for profit or gain’.
- **Family life** – Childminders typically integrate the care of children into their own family life, and may give children the opportunity to experience daily activities that they would experience in their own family home. Internationally, the term ‘family day-care’ is often used to describe childminding.
- **Mixed age-groups** – Childminders typically accommodate mixed age groups, including both pre-school and school-age children, and may care for siblings of different ages at the same time. However, some centre-based providers also operate mixed age groups.

Childminders are distinguished from relative carers, through their care of **non-relatives** and through being **paid**. However, childminders may care for family members (both their own children and the children of relatives) in addition to non-family members (as is also the case for centre-based provision), and some relative carers may receive compensation for their caring from a child’s parents. Nevertheless, a defining feature of childminding is that it is a business and not exclusively a family arrangement, and for this reason it may be subject to regulation. (It should be noted that the concept of ‘pay’ here is understood broadly and is not limited to cash payments.)

For regulatory purposes, childminding is typically limited to more than a minimal **number of hours per day** or per week, and is thereby distinguished from ‘babysitting’. In Northern Ireland, for example, registration as a childminder is required where the care of a child is for more than two hours per day.

Childminding, which involves **care in the childminder’s home**, is also to be distinguished from care that takes place in the child’s home, which may be carried out by a nanny, an au pair or a ‘babysitter’. Care in a child’s own home may also be by someone called a ‘childminder’ in common usage. However, the employment relationship and the legal and regulatory context are different. Whereas a childminder working from the childminder’s own home is typically **self-employed** and offers a service that may be accessed on a public basis, someone caring for a child in the child’s own home is regarded as an employee of the child’s

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<sup>3</sup> The Early Years Regulations 2016 require both (regulated) childminders and single-handed operators of sessional pre-school services to have a second person who is familiar with the operation of the service to be at all times within close distance and available to attend in the event of an emergency.

parents. In addition, in many cases the employment of someone in the child's home often involves a combination of caring with other roles, e.g. cleaning or other domestic duties.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, because they work in the parents'/child's home rather than their own home, au pairs and nannies cannot be held solely responsible for the safety or suitability of that home for the purpose of early learning or childcare.

For the purpose of clarity, this Action Plan defines '**childminder**' as someone who cares for children in the childminder's home, and uses the term '**nanny**' for someone who cares for children in the child's home.

## 1.2 Benefits of childminding

Childminding, as defined in 1.1, offers a wide range of benefits for children and families. It is not suggested here that either of childminding or centre-based provision is 'better' than the other. However, the benefits of childminding are sufficiently large and wide-ranging that there is a strong case for giving parents choice of setting-type through placing childminding on an equal footing to centre-based in terms of the regulatory framework and availability of subsidies, supports and information.

### **Evidence on outcomes for children**

Despite growing interest at a policy level, it is recognised that the contribution to outcomes made by childminding is an under-developed area of research.<sup>5</sup> Existing research points to a range of potential benefits of childminding, though objective data does not provide clear evidence for either childminding or centre-based provision achieving better outcomes, particularly in a context in which childminders are regulated and receive training and quality supports.

Differences in children's outcomes may reflect the differences between setting-types in adult-child interactions as well as in the level of support available to practitioners. For example, whereas practitioners in centre-based care may be more likely to benefit from team-work, time for reflection, educational resources and continuing professional development, all of which may facilitate improved child outcomes, interactions between childminders and children may benefit from greater consistency and continuity of care, lower adult-child ratios and an on-going partnership with parents. Childminding by definition involves continuity of care, whereas this is not always a feature of centre-based care, and typically involves a low ratio of staff to children, which is recognised as an important element of structural quality,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In the case of au pairs, the Irish Workplace Commission has ruled that au pairs are domestic employees with an entitlement to the minimum wage.

<sup>5</sup> Ang, L., Brooker, E., & Stephen, C. (2017). A Review of the Research on Childminding: Understanding Children's Experiences in Home-Based Childcare Settings. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45(2), 261-270.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission Working Group. (2014). *Proposal for Key Principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the Auspices of the European Commission. Brussels: European Commission.

with evidence that lower ratios can be predictive of positive caregiving and children's early socio-emotional development<sup>7,8</sup>, with a stronger effect for younger children.<sup>9</sup>

The Growing up in Ireland (GUI) study has found positive effects of childminding<sup>10</sup> on children's vocabulary,<sup>11</sup> In the UK Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) higher verbal ability has also been associated with the use of both formal and informal individual<sup>12</sup> early learning and care.<sup>13</sup>

There is also evidence of a positive impact of childminding on emotional outcomes for children.<sup>14</sup> Children who are cared for by a non-relative are found to be less likely to experience internalising behaviour problems and may be more socially competent.<sup>15</sup> Childminders have been associated with fewer emotional symptoms and more behavioural self-regulation.<sup>16</sup> It has also been found that home-based environments may reduce anxiety in early childhood.<sup>17</sup> In general, babies and toddlers in non-parental early learning and care settings are more likely to avoid anxiety and stress if they develop a lasting secondary attachment bond with one caregiver who is consistently available to them, one which is more likely when care is provided by an individual carer such as a childminder.<sup>18</sup>

There is some evidence that childminding may play a supportive role in children's transitions and connections from home to school environments.<sup>19</sup> It has also been found that childminding can provide a form of family support,<sup>20</sup> especially for vulnerable families.

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<sup>7</sup> Leach, P., Barnes, J., Malmberg, L.-E., Sylva, K., & Stein, A. (2008). The Quality of Different Types of Child Care at 10 and 18 months: A Comparison Between Types and Factors Related to Quality. *Early Child Development and Care*, 178, 177–209.

<sup>8</sup> Dalli, C., White, E. J., Rockel, J., Duhn, I., Buchanan, E., Davidson, S., Ganly, S., Kus, L. & Wang, B. (2011). *Quality Early Childhood Education for Under-Two-Year-Olds: What Should It Look Like? A Literature Review*. Report to the Ministry of Education. New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

<sup>9</sup> Melhuish, E. (2016). *Discussion Paper: Provision of Quality Early Childcare Services*. Prepared for the Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Brussels: European Commission.

<sup>10</sup> The GUI study distinguishes between 'relative care' (usually by a grandparent), 'non-relative care' (typically a childminder) and 'centre-based care' (e.g. crèche) as the main types of non-parental care.

<sup>11</sup> McGinnity, F., Russell, H., & Murray, A. (2015). *Non-Parental Childcare and Child Cognitive Outcomes at Age 5*. Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

<sup>12</sup> In the Study of Early Education and Development (SEED), settings are divided into formal group (e.g. nurseries), formal individual (e.g. childminders), and informal individual (e.g. friends and relatives).

<sup>13</sup> Morris, S. P., Melhuish, E., & Gardiner, J. (2017). *Study of Early Education and Development (SEED): Impact Study on Early Education Use and Child Outcomes up to Age Three*. London: Department for Education.

<sup>14</sup> French G. (2007). *Children's Early Learning and Development: A Research Paper*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

<sup>15</sup> Russell, H., Kenny, O. & McGinnity, F. (2016). *Childcare, Early Education and Socio-Emotional Outcomes at Age 5: Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) Study*. Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute.

<sup>16</sup> Morris, S. P., Melhuish, E., & Gardiner, J. (2017). *Study of Early Education and Development (SEED): Impact Study on Early Education Use and Child Outcomes up to Age Three*. London: Department for Education.

<sup>17</sup> Coplan, R., Findlay, L. C., & Schneider, B. H. (2010). Where do Anxious Children 'Fit' Best? Childcare and the Emergence of Anxiety in Early Childhood. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 42(3), 185.

<sup>18</sup> Bowlby, R. (2007). Babies and Toddlers in Non-Parental Daycare can Avoid Stress and Anxiety if They Develop a Lasting Secondary Attachment Bond with One Carer Who is Consistently Accessible to Them. *Attachment & Human Development*, 9(4), 307-319.

<sup>19</sup> Ang, L., Brooker, E., & Stephen, C. (2017) A Review of the Research on Childminding: Understanding Children's Experiences in Home-Based Childcare Settings. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45(2), 261-270.

### **Children's preferences**

There is limited evidence on children's preferences for childminding as opposed to centre-based care. However, the evidence available indicates that the home environment and 'family' setting of childminding may appeal to many children of both pre-school and school age.

The *First 5* report on the national consultation with young children aged 3-5 (including both pre-school and school-age children)<sup>21</sup> found that home and family were very important to young children, though some young children also spoke favourably about centre-based services. Young children enjoyed 'the experience of being at home', and disliked being away from family. Similarly, a Start Strong consultation with young children found the importance to children of having their families around them.<sup>22</sup> While childminding does not involve care by a child's own family, it offers a family setting and a 'home-from-home' environment.

A survey undertaken for the Action Plan on School Age Childcare<sup>23</sup> highlighted a range of reasons children value childminders and home-based care. Children described positive relationships with childminders and the opportunity to play and socialise with friends. Children mentioned food cooked in the home as a favourable feature of after-school settings. Older children also acknowledged the trust placed in childminders by their parents.

### **Parental preferences**

Many parents prefer to use childminders, liking its integration in family life and 'home-from-home' environment.<sup>24</sup> However, while continued extensive use of childminders by parents is an indication that many parents prefer childminding to centre-based care, parents' decisions may reflect a range of factors other than preference for type of care, including availability, cost, location, flexibility, and perceptions of quality.

Surveys of parents may provide clearer evidence of preferences. A survey of parents undertaken by the Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector, to which more than 3,600 parents responded, indicated a high level of parental satisfaction with childminders (with 72% of respondents stating they were 'very satisfied' with their childminder). However, such a survey cannot indicate what proportion of parents (whether currently using centre-based care, a childminder, or another form of care) would choose a childminder if all forms of provision were equally accessible.<sup>25</sup> A CSO survey in 2016 asked parents what *alternative* childcare arrangement they would like to use that they do not

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<sup>20</sup> Garrity, S., & McGrath, B. (2011). 'It's Not Like a Job Now; It's Part of Me': Exploring African Women's Experiences in the Irish Childcare Sector. *Child Care in Practice*, 17(1), 69-86.

<sup>21</sup> Coyne, I., Mallon, D., & Chubb, E. (2018). *First 5: A National Consultation with Young Children on A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

<sup>22</sup> Start Strong (2011). *If I Had a Magic Wand: Young Children's Visions and Ideas for Early Care and Education Services*. Dublin: Start Strong.

<sup>23</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2017) *Action Plan on School Age Childcare*. Dublin: Government Publications.

<sup>24</sup> Fauth, R., Owen, S., & Jelcic, H. (2012). *The Next Best Thing to Being at Home: Parents' View of Quality in Home-Based Childcare Settings*. Research Summary. London: NCB Research Centre.

<sup>25</sup> Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector (2018) *Pathway to a Quality Support and Assurance System for Childminding: Volume 2*.

currently use, and the category of ‘paid childminder / au pair / nanny’ was selected by 18% of parents of pre-school children and 14% of parents of school-age children.<sup>26</sup>

The survey of parents carried out by the Working Group also provides insight into the factors considered important by parents in choosing childminding services over centre-based care. Factors considered important also included flexible hours, support with drop-offs and pick-ups, and proximity to the family home. There is also evidence that some parents perceive childminding as supporting a return to work. Other research has similarly pointed to a range of factors taken into account by parents who choose to use a childminder; parents may see the quality of service provided by childminders as higher, with lower ratios and greater potential for personalised care and understanding of children’s individual needs.<sup>27</sup> Parents may also perceive the home-based environment as preferable.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the mix of activities and outings offered by childminders has been identified by some parents as a reason for selecting a childminder over centre-based care.<sup>29</sup>

Related evidence suggests that parents may desire a sense of ‘getting on’ with childminders, working in partnership, and perceiving childminding as an extension of their own parenting.<sup>30</sup> Trustworthiness has also been identified as an important consideration in choosing a childminder.<sup>31</sup>

### **Access and economic benefits**

While the lack of regulation of childminding means there is little concrete evidence on the geographic location or operating hours provided by childminders, childminders may be likely to deliver a larger share of services in rural and remote settings,<sup>32</sup> and may be more likely to offer flexible hours of attendance, of particular benefit to parents engaged in shift work or working irregular hours.

Childminders can deliver services without incurring significant capital costs or overheads,<sup>33</sup> through caring for children within their existing homes. As a result, childminders can operate on a smaller scale, and are more likely to be able to maintain viable businesses in areas with low demand.

Childminders operating out of their homes may also be conveniently located for families, closer to parents’ homes. This is acknowledged as positive by many parents, with childminders sometimes perceived as part of the community.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> CSO (2017) QNHS Module on Childcare, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Fauth, R., Owen, S., & Jelcic, H. (2012). *The Next Best Thing to Being at Home: Parents’ View of Quality in Home-Based Childcare Settings: Research Summary*. London: NCB Research Centre.

<sup>28</sup> Shannon, R., Geraghty, T., & Molyneaux, F. (2014). *Childminding in Northern Ireland: An Exploration of Practice, Quality and the Impact of Vertical Placements on Children*. London: National Children’s Bureau

<sup>29</sup> Fauth, R., Jelcic, H., Lea, J., Willnott, N. & Owen, S. (2011). *Childminding Practice in England: Final Report*. London: National Children’s Bureau.

<sup>30</sup> Fauth, R., Owen, S., & Jelcic, H. (2012). *The Next Best Thing to Being at Home: Parents’ View of Quality in Home-Based Childcare Settings: Research Summary*. London: NCB Research Centre.

<sup>31</sup> Huskindon, T., Pye, J., Medien, K., Dobie, S., Ferguson, C., Gardner, C., Gilby, N., Littlewood, M. & D’Souza, J. (2013). *Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2011*. London: Department for Education.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

<sup>33</sup> Department for Education (2018) *Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers: Main Summary*. London: Department for Education.

<sup>34</sup> Fauth, R., Owen, S., & Jelcic, H. (2012). *The next best thing to being at home: Parents’ view of quality in home-based childcare settings. Research summary*. London: NCB Research Centre.

For all these reasons, widespread access to regulated childminding can facilitate parents' labour market participation, particularly female labour market participation, and can increase supply of childcare places, strengthening competition in the 'childcare market', particularly in local areas where access to a choice of centre-based services is limited. In a market context, increased competition may both increase pressure for quality provision and reduce the risk of excessive fee increases.

Wider economic benefits also arise from the raising of quality standards in early learning and care services, given the impact of high-quality provision on child development and educational outcomes. Where childminders who previously operated in the informal economy are incentivised to enter the formal economy, there can also be an increase in tax revenues.

### **1.3 The childminding sector in Ireland**

#### **Legal status**

Many childminders are exempt from regulation currently as a result of exemptions set out in Section 58L of the Child Care Act 1991. Prior to February 2019, only childminders who cared for more than three pre-school children of different families<sup>35</sup> were subject to regulation and therefore required to register with Tusla (or, prior to the establishment of Tusla, notify the HSE).

As from February 2019, when Section 22 of the Childcare Support Act 2018 came into force, the scope of regulation has been broadened also to include a service that involves the care of more than six children of any age at one time, in addition to those who care for more than three pre-school children. However, as noted in section 1.1 above, childminding is generally understood to imply the care of six or fewer children.

As of August 2019, the number of childminders registered with Tusla was 81, all registered in relation to their care of pre-school children. While the number registered with Tusla is expected to rise somewhat over the course of 2019 as a result of the changes introduced in the Childcare Support Act and the introduction of regulations for school-age childcare, no major change in numbers registered is expected in the absence of regulatory reform.

While it is assumed that a large number of childminders are exempt from regulation, it is also assumed that there are some childminders who fall within the scope of the current regulations but have not registered with Tusla even though they are legally required to do so.

For childminders who are exempt from regulation, a 'voluntary notification' process was introduced in 2006 under the National Childcare Strategy 2006 - 2010, which involved childminders choosing to notify City and County Childcare Committees. If certain criteria are met, childminders are eligible for some supports, including a Childminding Development Grant and Childcare Services Tax Relief (see below). However, voluntary notification is not a legal status, and the numbers involved have fallen in recent years as the level of support available for the process has reduced. There are currently approximately 610 childminders who have voluntarily notified their City / County Childcare Committee. In addition, DCYA

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<sup>35</sup> Where the children cared for by a childminder are all from one family (other than the childminder's own family), the childminder is exempt from regulation,

provides annual funding to Childminding Ireland, which has approximately 700 members, who benefit from supports provided by Childminding Ireland and are required to be Garda vetted.

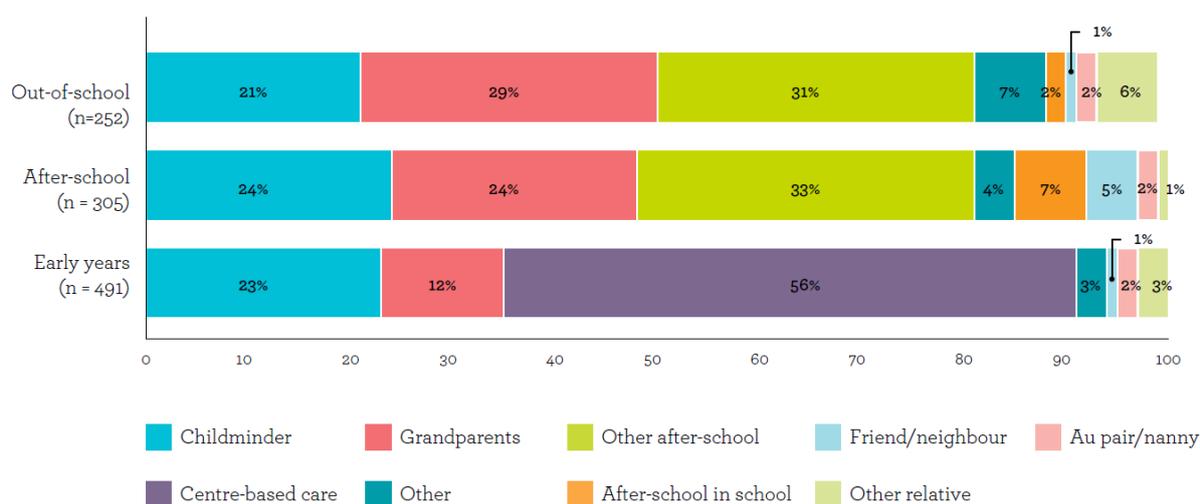
### **Estimates of numbers**

There is considerable uncertainty about the number of children cared for by childminders, and the number of childminders working in Ireland today.

A CSO survey of parents in 2016 indicated that approx. 13% of pre-school children and 8% of primary school children in Ireland are cared for by a childminder, an au pair or a nanny, in combination with other forms of parental and non-parental care.<sup>36</sup> Given current population estimates, this equates to approximately 84,300 children.

However, the CSO survey question groups together childminders (as defined in this Action Plan) with nannies and au pairs, and it is not known what the relative numbers of each are. The chart below, drawn from an online consultation with parents which did attempt to distinguish childminders from nannies and au pairs, suggests that use of childminders far exceeds the use of au pairs and nannies, with about 92% of the combined number cared for by childminders. However, the sample of parents who responded to the consultation survey was not representative. In addition, as the term ‘childminder’ is often used to describe a person caring for a child in the child’s own home, it is not clear to what extent the responses shown in the chart reflect actual provision. More broadly, the CSO survey data itself rests on a survey of parents and there is inevitably scope for misinterpretation of the questions asked. Unlike with centre-based provision, where the requirement to register with Tusla means that administrative data provides a reliable cross-check with survey data, there is no administrative data on the number of children provided for by childminders in Ireland.

### **Types of early learning and care and school-age childcare**



Source: online consultation with parents carried out during preparation of the Inter-Departmental Working Group report, *Future Investment in Childcare (2015)*.

<sup>36</sup> Central Statistics Office (2016) *Quarterly National Household Survey Childcare Quarter 1, 2016*.

On the basis of the CSO survey data, and an assumption that childminders on average mind 2.5 pre-school children (which drew on a 2009 survey of Childminding Ireland members), in 2011 Goodbody’s Economic Consultants estimated there were approx. 19,000 childminders caring for pre-school children.<sup>37</sup> (The Goodbody’s report did not look at school-age children.) Subsequent estimates applied the 2.5 figure to the total number of children cared for by childminders (est. more than 80,000) the Working Group estimated that there could be 35,000 childminders in working in Ireland.<sup>38</sup> However, this estimate does not take into account the fact that many childminders care for both pre-school and school-age children.

A more recent (2012) survey of Childminding Ireland members indicates that on average childminders may care for approx. 4 children, when both pre-school and school-age children are counted.<sup>39</sup>

Applying this figure to the estimate of 84,000 children of which 92% may be cared for by a childminder, it can be estimated that there could be up to 19,400 childminders. However, this should be seen as an outer limit, as it is very likely that a significant proportion of those counted here as ‘childminders’ care for children in the child’s home and so would not fall within the definition of childminder used in this Action Plan.

### **History of supports**

Access to the main State funding schemes for early learning and care has been limited to service providers who are regulated. In practice this has meant that very few childminders have taken part in these schemes. The number of childminders currently in contract for delivering State funding schemes is set out in the table below:

CCSP 2018	19
CETS 2018	2
ECCE 2018	25
Total number of registered childminders	81

As most childminders have fallen outside the scope of regulation, a number of initiatives and schemes have aimed to provide supports to unregulated childminders, to raise quality standards and incentivise childminders to move out of the informal economy.

The National Childminding Initiative, which began in 2002, contained a number of strands:

- Publication of National Guidelines for Childminders.
- The voluntary notification system, through which childminders who were not required to notify the HSE (or, more recently, register with Tusla) could voluntarily notify their local City / County Childcare Committee and thereby benefit from a range of supports.
- An introductory training course – the Quality Awareness Programme (QAP).

<sup>37</sup> Goodbody Economic Consultants (2011) *Children 2020: Cost-Benefit Analysis*.

<sup>38</sup> Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector (2018) *Pathway to a Quality Support and Assurance System for Childminding: Volume 1*.

<sup>39</sup> Childminding Ireland (2013) *Report on Survey of Registered Members in 2012*.

- The Childminding Development Grant, which was established in 2004 and is designed to help childminders with the cost of safety items, equipment, play resources or minor household adaptations. Childminders are able to access up to €1,000 in funding to cover 90% of the costs.
- Childcare Services Tax Relief, through which childminders may avail of an exemption from tax on up to €15,000 of income earned from childminding. (This tax relief is only available to childminders who are not eligible to register with Tusla currently, e.g. those minding three or fewer pre-school children)
- The appointment of Childminding Advisory Officers, some employed by the HSE and some by City and County Childcare Committees, to offer information, support and training to childminders, to maintain the voluntary notification system and administer the other supports aimed at childminders.

The Childminding Advisory Officer posts were largely discontinued in 2012-2013 as a result of budget cuts, and there has since then been a gradual decline in the take-up of other supports. For example, the table below shows the gradual decline since 2014 in the number of childminders applying for and receiving the Childminding Development Grant (CMDG).

	<b>CMDG applications received</b>	<b>CMDG applications approved</b>
2012	383	273
2013	295	280
2014	314	298
2015	224	215
2016	247	237
2017	201	189
2018	189	173

## **1.4 Childminding in other jurisdictions**

While the legal status and usage of childminding varies considerably, there are many jurisdictions in which childminding is fully regulated, and several in which it forms a significant part of ‘formal’ provision. Where it is regulated, there is also significant variation in the minimum requirements, which range from safety and health checks to staff and curriculum standards and pedagogical supervision by an accredited body. According to a 2017 OECD review of provision for pre-school children across OECD countries, ‘family day care... is most prevalent for children under the age of 3’.<sup>40</sup>

A 2019 EU (Eurydice) report on provision across Europe finds that:

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<sup>40</sup> OECD (2017) *Starting Strong 2017: Key Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD, p.60.

‘Three quarters of European education systems provide for regulated home-based ECEC [early childhood education and care] services, which must follow certain pre-defined rules and quality standards. In 12 education systems, childminders offering this type of provision are required to undergo specific training. The duration of this type of training ranges from less than 50 hours in some German *Länder*, Latvia and some Swiss Cantons to 1,053 hours in the French Community of Belgium. It most often lies between 100 and 300 hours.... In one third of the education systems where regulated home-based provision exists, the top-level authority requires no minimum qualifications and no specific training to become a childminder.’<sup>41</sup>

In comparison, in Ireland the current qualification requirement for Tusla registration is a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

The table below indicate the range of requirements on childminders in a number of jurisdictions. As indicated, there are now many jurisdictions – including England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – in which all childminders are required to register with a regulatory body, and are subject to a range of requirements in relation to police vetting, inspection, and training. While qualification requirements for childminders are limited to introductory training courses, it should be noted that in many such jurisdictions (unlike in Ireland) there is also no requirement on all staff in centre-based settings to have a relevant qualification.

#### Requirements for childminders in selected jurisdictions

<b>England</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Registration	Must register with Ofsted or a Childminding Agency if looking after children under the age of 8.
Vetting	Disclosure and Barring Service checks for childminder and all residing adults over the age of 16 in the home.
Inspection	Yes, from one or both of the agencies that the childminder is registered with.
Qualification	Required to attend a Local Authority approved course e.g. an Introduction to Childminding course.
Additional Training	Paediatric First Aid Certificate.

<b>N. Ireland</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Registration	Must register with the Health & Social Care Trust.
Vetting	The police check everyone aged over 10 living in the childminder's home.
Inspection	Yes, by the Health and Social Care Trust.
Qualification	Pre-Registration Training.
Additional Training	Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day Care require a childminder to attend relevant training in order to gain knowledge and information about Health &

<sup>41</sup> European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice (2019) *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe, 2019 Edition*. Luxembourg: P.79.

	Safety, Safeguarding Children and an Introduction to Paediatric First Aid.
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<b>Wales</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Registration	Must register with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales.
Vetting	Disclosure and Barring Service checks for childminder and all residing adults over the age of 16 in the home.
Inspection	Yes, by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales.
Qualification	Pre-Registration Training.
Additional Training	Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day Care require a childminder to attend relevant training in order to gain knowledge and information about Health & Safety, Safeguarding Children and an Introduction to Paediatric First Aid.

<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Registration	Must register with the Care Inspectorate and all the adults living or working at the home where childminder is based must also register.
Vetting	The Care Inspectorate will carry out Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme checks and Disclosure Scotland criminal records checks on the childminder and also check anyone else who is living or working at the home over 16 years old.
Inspection	Inspected by the Care Inspectorate.
Qualification	The Care Inspectorate recommend the childminder to complete a Childminding Induction Learning Course.

<b>France</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Registration	Registration is linked to specific approval from La Protection Maternelle et Infantile (PMI) and local authorities, which recognise their professional status and fix the number and the ages of the children they can look after.
Vetting	No vetting requirement.
Inspection	Inspected by the PMI Inspectors.
Qualification	The childminder must complete 60 hours of training before taking on the first child, and a further 60 hours over the following two years. (Those already holding certain childcare qualifications may be exempt.)

<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Registration	Must be approved and registered by the municipality, and childminders are employed by the local authority.
Vetting	The childminder requires a child certificate, which includes information on convictions and violation of the Penal Code's rules on sexual offences in relation to minors or to child pornography.
Inspection	Inspected by municipality Inspectors.

Qualification	No training requirement.
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Netherlands	Requirements
Registration	Childminders must be registered with a childminding agency that is registered in the Dutch National Childcare and Playgroup Register ( <i>Landelijk Register Kinderopvang en Peuterspeelzalen, LRKP</i> ).
Vetting	Childminders must have a certificate of good conduct. All adults over 18 and all individuals present in the home over the age of 12 when children are present also require vetting.
Inspection	Annual inspection of the Childminding Agencies and random inspection of the childminders.
Qualification	Childminders must have relevant qualification at least at ISCED level 3 (equivalent to Level 4/5 on Ireland’s NFQ).
Additional Training	Childminders must have a registered and valid first aid certificate that focuses on children.

## 1.5 Development of the Action Plan

A number of reports in recent years have called for development of a national plan or strategy to bring childminding into mainstream provision, including widening the scope of regulation:

- In 2013, the Expert Advisory Group on the National Early Years Strategy recommended ‘the regulation and support of all paid, non-relative childminders’, with amendment of the Child Care Act 1991, a transition phase prior to regulatory change, and the development of regulations that are proportionate and appropriate to childminders’ home environment.<sup>42</sup>
- In 2015, the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Future Investment in Childcare recommended ‘a stepped programme of reforms [for childminders] migrating from voluntary through to mandatory requirements’, which ‘might also include the re-introduction of a childminding advisory service’.<sup>43</sup>
- In 2017, the Action Plan on School-Age Childcare called for establishment of an expert working group to develop ‘a robust quality assurance system for childminders’.<sup>44</sup>

The 2016 *Programme for a Partnership Government* made a commitment to ‘support the development of a phased programme of reforms for childminders making it easier to support both families and childminders’.

Following through on this Government commitment, and building on the recommendations in previous reports, in September 2016 the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs established a **Working Group** on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector to:

<sup>42</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013). *Right from the Start: Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the National Early Years Strategy*. Government Publications.

<sup>43</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015). *Report of Inter-Departmental Working Group: Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland*. Government Publications.

<sup>44</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2017) *Action Plan on School Age Childcare*. Dublin: Government Publications.

- Provide a description of the childminding sector in Ireland, including all the different categories of childminders and, where possible, the estimated number in each category.
- Make recommendations in respect of which categories should be included in plans for reform and support of the sector, and (if necessary) provide a rationale for excluding others.
- In the short term, identify the reforms and supports that are required to have a robust system of quality assurance for childminders.
- Make proposals for, and cost where appropriate, a model of reforms and supports for the childminding sector in the short (1-3 years) term, medium (3-5 years) and long (5-10 years) term.
- Examine the feasibility and implications of the migration from voluntary to mandatory regulation for the childminding sector.

As part of its work, the Working Group carried out a **consultation** with parents through a parents' survey in May 2017, and consulted childminders through a survey of Childminding Ireland members and a discussion day that allowed more in-depth discussions with 22 childminders from around the country. It also drew on the findings of the consultation with 177 children aged 5-12 that was undertaken in 2016 to inform the Action Plan on School-Age Childcare. The parent's survey had 3,630 responses, and asked questions about use of childminding and attitudes towards childminding. The survey of childminders had 357 responses. Further consultation is planned as part of the implementation of this Action Plan (see section 5.2).

The Working Group's **report** was published in March 2018. In line with its terms of reference, the report set out a series of short, medium and longer-term recommendations that aim to move towards the regulation and support of all paid, non-relative childminders over a 5-10 year timeframe. The Annex contains a summary of its proposals. This Childminding Action Plan draws heavily on the Working Group's report, and the Working Group's efforts are gratefully acknowledged.

The Childminding Action Plan also follows through on Government commitments made in *First 5*, the Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and Families, which was published in November 2018. *First 5* commits to:

- Promote and support the registration of paid, non-relative childminders currently eligible to register with Tusla in preparation for the introduction of the [National] Childcare Scheme.
- Extend regulation to all other paid, non-relative childminders on a phased basis over the lifetime of the Strategy [2019-2028], building on the 2018 Working Group report. This will make [National Childcare Scheme] subsidies available to more parents who use childminding services.
- All regulated childminders by 2028 to hold a minimum qualification (level to be determined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs by end 2019). Undertake research on the ELC (and school-age childcare) needs of parents who work atypical hours or live in rural communities and develop recommendations for future action.

## 2. Aims and objectives

Childminding offers many **benefits to children and parents but currently receives little formal recognition from the State**. While the centre-based care of children has evolved rapidly in the last 20 years in policy terms, childminding has remained at the margins of funding, support and regulation, in spite of its many advantages and its continued popularity among parents. This Action Plan sets out a 10-year plan for moving childminding into the mainstream of regulation and State support.

The Childminding Action Plan follows through on the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to ‘support the development of a phased programme of reforms for childminders making it easier to support both families and childminders’, and the Government commitment in *First 5* to ‘extend regulation to all other paid, non-relative childminders. An Action Plan for Childminding will set out a plan for moving progressively towards wider regulation and support for childminders over the lifetime of the Strategy [2019-2028] building on the 2018 Working Group report’.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.1 Aims

The overall objective of this Action Plan is to improve access to high quality and affordable early learning and care and school-age childcare through childminding. To do this, the action plan sets out an incremental and supportive pathway to regulation. This will enable more childminders to access Government subsidies, making their services more affordable to parents. It will also enable them to access a variety of supports to assist them in meeting regulatory and quality requirements.

In achieving this overall objective, the Action Plan will contribute to the following aims:

- Support **parental choice regarding type** of provider of early learning and care and school-age childcare.
- Increase access to **affordable** early learning and care and school-age childcare.
- Increase the **availability of places** for early learning and care, especially for under-3s, and for school-age childcare.
- Offer more **flexibility** for parents who work irregular hours.
- Support **labour market participation for all parents, including those** who live in areas with low population density.
- Improve the **quality** of provision of early learning and care and school-age childcare, thus supporting **child development and educational outcomes**.
- Provide greater formal **recognition** for childminders and support their **professional development**.

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<sup>45</sup> Government of Ireland (2018) *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028*. Government Publications.

## 2.2 Objectives

Within the overall objective of bringing childminders into the mainstream of regulation and supports, the Action Plan has a number of specific objectives:

1. Enable a far greater number of parents who use childminders to benefit from **subsidies under the National Childcare Scheme**.
2. Support quality assurance of childminders and safeguarding of children through **extending the scope of regulation and inspection** to all paid, non-relative childminders.
3. Provide greater recognition of childminders and **tailor childminder regulations and inspection processes to reflect the home environment** in which childminders work and the informal routes by which childminders often enter the sector.
4. Develop bespoke resources to **support the quality of childminding** provision, including through the development of **staffed local networks** to provide professional development and peer support, offering also the possibility of a new partnership relationship between childminders and centre-based services.
5. Open up **financial supports and training** opportunities for childminders including an **expanded Learner Fund** to assist childminders to meet qualification requirements and to provide a continuous professional development system.
6. Provide a **supportive, phased transition process**, to facilitate the largest possible number of childminders to enter the regulated sector, the sphere of quality assurance, and access to Government subsidies, while recognising the time and supports required for this reform.

## 2.3 Timing: urgency and caution

This Action Plan is long overdue. Childminders play a central role in the provision of both early learning and care and school-age childcare in Ireland, but they are almost entirely unregulated as most childminders are exempt from registration with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Calls for greater recognition and support for childminders have been made for many years, and there is an **ongoing need for regulation** to protect children and provide assurance to parents of the quality of childminding provision.

While there has long been a need for an action plan for childminding, the imminent introduction of **the National Childcare Scheme creates both an opportunity and an urgency** to act now. The National Childcare Scheme will make subsidies available to an increased number of parents using a diverse range of types of provision, as long as the providers are registered with Tusla. The prospect of being able to take part in the National Childcare Scheme creates a positive incentive for childminders to register, giving them – and the parents who choose to use childminders – an opportunity that has not previously existed to access subsidies.

Furthermore, if action is not taken now to extend the possibility of registration to childminders then, given the impact that the National Childcare Scheme may have on parental choices, some families who will be eligible for significant subsidies under the National Childcare Scheme may switch to centre-based childcare, creating a risk that a number childminders may be put out of business as parents move to using providers who are

part of the new Scheme. If this were to happen, it would significantly reduce parental choice and limit access to affordable options for early learning and care and school-age childcare.

While the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme creates some urgency, there is also a **need for caution**. The proposed action plan includes significant change for childminders. **It is critical that as many childminders as possible are supported to make the transition to the new era of regulation and to be able to access subsidies for families using their services. Given the large scale of reforms** involved, with thousands of childminders expected to move into the scope of regulation and the formal economy and the need to build the infrastructure to support the reforms, the Action Plan adopts a **phased approach** that will extend over the lifetime of *First 5* (through to 2028):

- Phase 1 will allow for **consultation, research and development** actions, to ensure that the regulations that apply to childminders are appropriate to the home environment, to build the quality support infrastructure required (including expansion of inspectorates and provision of training), and to ensure reforms are based on consultation and research evidence.
- Phase 2 will allow for a **supportive transition** process in which the National Childcare Scheme is opened to childminders at the earliest possible opportunity, while giving childminders adequate time to meet all regulatory requirements. A transition phase lasting several years is considered reasonable given the scale of change involved, and the fact that practitioners in centre-based services similarly had transition phases during the extension of regulations. For example, the introduction of a minimum qualification requirement for centre-based practitioners was first announced in mid-2013, regulations were signed in mid-2016, and the requirement into force at the beginning of 2017.
- While the end-point of the Action Plan is clear (full mainstreaming into regulations and supports for early learning and care and school-age childcare), the Action Plan leaves open the precise timing of movement between Phases 1, 2 and 3. Given the potential cost to the Exchequer of opening the National Childcare Scheme to childminders, the timing of the transition from Phase 1 to 2 will be **Budget-dependent** and will depend on agreement with the Department for Public Expenditure and Reform.

## 3. Areas of action

This chapter presents actions, and the rationale for those actions, within four areas:

1. Regulatory change
2. Qualification and training requirements
3. On-going quality supports
4. Funding and financial supports

Within each area, short (Phase 1), medium (Phase 2) and longer-term (Phase 3) actions are identified.

### 3.1 Regulatory change

#### Legislation

A core requirement for receiving a State subsidy under the National Childcare Scheme will be registration with Tusla. However, at the time of publication just 81 childminders (out of possibly more than ten thousand) are registered. According to the Working Group report, one of the main reasons that childminders cite for the low number of registered childminders is childminders' dissatisfaction with current regulations, as they feel they are not designed for a home setting.

To bring childminders within the scope of registration and therefore subsidisation will require amendment of Section 58L of the Child Care Act 1991 (as amended by the Childcare Support Act 2018), which currently exempts and excludes from regulation three categories of person:

- (a) The care of one or more children undertaken by a relative of the child or children or the spouse of such relative,
- (b) A person taking care of one or more children of the same family and no other such children (other than that person's own such children) in that person's home,
- (c) A person taking care of not more than 6 children, of which not more than 3 are pre-school children, of different families (other than that person's own such children) at the same time in that person's home, except where that person has been continuously registered as an early years service for a period of one year, wishes to remain on the register, and continues to satisfy such conditions as may be prescribed.

In order to bring all paid, non-relative childminders within the scope of regulation, it is proposed to amend the legislation by removing exemptions (b) and (c). It is proposed to retain exemption (a), as it is not intended to regulate the care of relatives (except in cases where a childminder also provides a pre-school or school-age service for non-relative children).

This proposal is in line with the recommendations of the Working Group, which argued that care of children by a relative in the relative's home should continue to be exempt from the definition given that relatives tend to care for children to help family members, providing kinship care rather than operating as a business that may be accessed on a public basis.

While drafting of the legislative amendment will begin early in Phase 1 of the Action Plan, and it is hoped that the Oireachtas will pass such an amendment at the earliest opportunity, the amendment will not be commenced until there is full readiness to move to Phase 2 of the

Action Plan. As commencement of such an amendment will immediately bring all paid, non-relative childminders within the scope of regulation, the amendment will only be commenced when:

- A childminder-focused review of the regulations has been completed (see below) and any amendments needed to the Regulations have been carried out;
- Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate is ready to register and inspect a potentially large number of childminders; and
- The budget is available to allow for the expansion of the National Childcare Scheme as a result of childminders beginning to register with Tusla.

### **Regulations**

The limited number of childminders who are currently required to register with Tusla's Children's Services Regulation division (those who care for more than six children at any one time or more than three pre-school children) are subject to two sets of Regulations: the Early Years Services Regulations 2016 in relation to pre-school children and the Registration of School-Age Services Regulations 2018 in relation to school-age children. The Regulations set out requirements that a service must meet at the time that it registers and also requirements that it must meet on an on-going basis and which may be subject to inspection by Tusla.

These Regulations are the same for (non-exempt) childminders and for centre-based services. However, in the course of carrying out inspections Tusla interprets the Regulations differently according to the context. This tailored approach to inspections was laid out in Tusla's Quality and Regulatory Framework (QRF) published in 2018, which sets out explicitly the ways in which Tusla interprets the Early Years Services Regulations in practice when carrying out inspections in relation to pre-school children. A separate QRF document was published that is specific to childminders.<sup>46</sup>

While the QRF has been widely welcomed, childminders have argued that the current Regulations and inspection process are not proportionate or appropriate to the childminding context. The Working Group report states (vol.1, p.26) that:

'Elements of the regulations – for example those relating to the premises and space, and to changing and sleeping requirements – are not suitable to a home-based environment as they were designed with centre-based childcare services in mind. Childminders consulted by the Working Group cited the inappropriateness of the regulations as a disincentive to register, and expressed a wish for specific childminding standards regulations tailored to the home-based childcare context.'

To address these concerns, during Phase 1 of the Action Plan a review of both sets of Regulations (both pre-school and school-age) and the QRF will be carried out to examine their appropriateness in a childminding context, and to identify amendments to ensure they are suitable for childminding. At a minimum, changes will be necessary to accommodate a transition process for childminders in relation to qualification requirements (see section 3.2). All options will be considered during the review, including the development of separate, childminder-specific Regulations. Following the review, amendments to the Regulations will be drafted.

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<sup>46</sup> Tusla (2018) *Quality and Regulatory Framework: Childminding*, Dublin: Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla.

The review will also examine the registration and inspection processes carried out by Tusla, as well as the size of the inspectorate. To accommodate the regulation of childminders, a significant increase in number of registration officers and inspectors is likely to be needed.

### **Garda Vetting**

It will be a requirement of registration with Tusla that any childminder is Garda vetted, and that any adult living in the childminder’s home is also Garda vetted. During Phase 1 of the Action Plan, legislation and regulations will be reviewed in conjunction with the Department of Justice and Equality to ensure that there is an adequate legal basis for all such vetting. Consultation will also take place with the Department of Justice and Equality in relation to resourcing of the National Vetting Bureau to accommodate increased applications for vetting from childminders.

<b>Actions (Legislation and regulations)</b>	
<b>Phase 1 – Consultation, research and development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of Advisory Group on Regulations and Inspection.</li> <li>• Review of Regulations and drafting of any necessary changes specific to childminders, including public consultation.</li> <li>• Amendment of the Child Care Act 1991.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2 – Transition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ending of legal exclusion from regulation.</li> <li>• Amended Regulations come into force, with lower qualification requirements during transition phase.</li> <li>• Communication actions to raise awareness of the new regulations.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3 – Full implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full training and qualification requirements in force as part of the regulations.</li> </ul>

## **3.2 Qualifications and training**

This section first considers the question of qualification requirements for registered childminders. It then considers the qualification requirements for the leaders of the staffed local childminding networks discussed in section 3.3 below. The final two sections consider other training requirements, and delivery options for training. To assist childminders to meet qualification and training requirements, the Action Plan will involve provision of financial supports through an expanded **Learner Fund**, discussed in section 3.4.

### **Qualifications for childminders**

Currently, the minimum qualification requirements for Tusla-registered childminders are identical to those for practitioners in centre-based services:

- For those working with pre-school children: a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.
- A higher (Level 6) contractual requirement for ‘room leaders’ providing the ECCE programme. In the case of childminders (as also with ‘sole traders’ who

deliver only a sessional ECCE service single-handed), the room-leader requirement applies to a childminder who wishes to offer the ECCE programme.

- For those working with school-age children, there is currently no qualification requirement (either in centre-based services or for childminders).<sup>47</sup> As part of the comprehensive regulation of school-age childcare, a qualification requirement in relation to school-age childcare will be introduced over the coming years, to be specified within the context of the forthcoming Workforce Development Plan.

However, because of the legal exemptions from regulation currently in place, a possibly large proportion of childminders are not subject to these requirements.

In considering the transition to a fully regulated childminding sector over the lifetime of this Action Plan, a key question is whether the qualification requirement for childminders should be set at the same level as that for centre-based practitioners. While the Working Group proposed that an ‘initial regulatory requirement’ should include a Level 5 minor award (i.e. module) in childminding, there were differences of opinion in the Working Group on the question of what level of full qualification requirement should be phased in over time.

Some members of the Working Group argued that:

‘Childminders should complete a major award in ECEC at QQI level 5 over time, within five years for example, in order to remain on the childminding register. This would be the same as the requirement for centre-based staff, giving childminders parity of professional status, and access to the provision of government subsidies on an equal footing with centres.’ (p.34)

In contrast, some members of the Working Group argued that:

‘The requirement to gain a major award in ECEC at QQI level 5 will form a barrier to registration and regulation for childminders. Under current regulations (2016), this requirement has coincided with a falling number of childminders registering with Tusla: from 179 in July 2016 to fewer than 120 by July 2017. Internationally, such a requirement is not found in thriving regulated childminding systems, where education is delivered in network communities of practice.’

**Three options** are considered here, along with the rationale for each:

<b>Options in relation to qualification and training requirements</b>	
<b>Option (1): Equivalent requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specify qualification requirements for childminders that are identical or equivalent to those for centre-based practitioners, while taking a pragmatic, phased approach to their introduction.</li> <li>• Would currently involve no qualification requirements in relation to school-age childcare by childminders (or for childminders who only care for school-age children). This</li> </ul>

<sup>47</sup> If a childminder cares for more than six children including both pre-school and school-age children and if four or more are of pre-school age then the Level 5 minimum qualification applies.

	<p>would change over the coming years, with a minimum qualification for school-age childcare to be set as part of the forthcoming Workforce Development Plan. Equivalence would require any qualification requirement introduced for school-age childcare to be applied over time also to childminders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would involve lead-in time during Phase 2 of the Action Plan, with equivalent qualification requirements to come into force in Phase 3.</li> </ul> <p><b>Rationale</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This approach would reflect an assumption that the work of a childminder is in essential respects the same as the work of a centre-based practitioner, while recognising the need for a lead-in time for childminders to meet a qualification requirement equivalent to that for centre-based practitioners, given that a large proportion of childminders are not subject to any qualification requirements at present.</li> </ul>
<p>Option (2): <b>Stepped requirements</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a transition process for childminders on an on-going, long-term basis, with childminders able to register with Tusla provided they have met a basic qualification or training requirement, and then required to meet qualification requirements equivalent to those for centre-based practitioners within a specified period (e.g. 2 or 3 years).</li> <li>• In this ‘stepped’ approach, childminders would continue to have a transition period for achieving full qualifications even in Phase 3 of the Action Plan, although the transition period for a childminder might be shorter in Phase 3 than in Phase 2. To take an example, Phase 2 might last four years, giving the first wave of regulated childminders a four-year period to meet full qualification requirements, whereas the transition period for each childminder registering with Tusla might be shortened to two years following the move to Phase 3 of the Action Plan.</li> </ul> <p><b>Rationale</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This approach would reflect an assumption that the different (less formal) entry-route into childminding is likely to remain the reality for the long term, as is the need for an incremental approach to support childminders to move out of the informal economy on a progressive pathway towards professional development.</li> </ul>
<p>Option (3): <b>Different requirements</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specify qualification requirements for childminders that are at a different level than those for centre-based practitioners, with these different requirements remaining in place long-term.</li> <li>• Might involve a basic qualification / training requirement being introduced in Phase 2 of the Action Plan and applying long-term, or it might involve a basic qualification / training requirement being introduced in Phase 2 and a somewhat</li> </ul>

	<p>higher requirement being introduced in Phase 3, albeit a requirement at a different level than that required of centre-based practitioners. Similarly, it could involve a ‘stepped’ approach, with a phased qualification requirement available long-term, but with that requirement different from the requirement for centre-based practitioners.</p> <p><b><i>Rationale</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This approach reflects an assumption that higher qualification requirements would be a significant deterrent to registration for childminders and would prevent participation in mainstream provision. It may also reflect the greater continuity of care, lower adult-child ratio and smaller group size that are found in childminding, all of which may strengthen the quality of adult-child interactions.</li> </ul>
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Given the need for any decision on qualification requirements for childminders to be considered in conjunction with decisions to be made on future qualification requirements for centre-based practitioners, the **Steering Group of the Workforce Development Plan**, which has recently been formed, will consider these options and by the end of 2019 make recommendations to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on:

- The ultimate qualification requirements for childminders to be achieved in Phase 3 (which, as noted in the table, could involve a phased qualification requirement for newly registered childminders, available on a long-term basis); and
- A basic (or transitional) qualification or training requirement to be specified for newly registered childminders in Phase 2 of the Action Plan.

An **Advisory Group on Qualifications and Training** will then be established as part of Phase 1 of the Childminding Action Plan to follow through on the development of the basic / transitional qualifications or training to be made a requirement in Phase 2 of the Action Plan. In doing so, the Advisory Group will consider the Quality Awareness Programme previously developed for childminders as well as the QQI Level 5 Minor Award in Childminding Practice, but the Working Group may also propose the development of new training programmes. However, an important factor will be to identify an award that can be readily built upon, to facilitate practitioners to move between childminding and centre-based provision.

It should be noted that the Level 5 regulatory minimum qualification requirement for staff working with pre-school children in centre-based services is recent. It only came into force at the beginning of 2017, following a transition period, with its introduction first signalled in mid-2013. To support the transition, a Learner Fund was made available to enable practitioners to meet the new requirement, and a ‘grandfathering’ declaration was available for staff close to retirement. It is anticipated that similar arrangements (a transition period, a Learner Fund, and a ‘grandfathering’ arrangement) would be provided to support the extension of a minimum qualification requirement to the cohort of childminders who are not yet subject to regulation. The Learner Fund is discussed further in section 3.4 below.

During Phase 1 of the Action Plan, while the review is under way and pending any change to the regulatory environment, registration with Tusla will remain restricted to childminders who hold a major Level 5 award.

### **Training for local network coordinators**

*First 5* specifies a target of achieving:

‘a graduate-led ELC workforce, with at least 50% of staff (i.e. all room leaders, assistant manager and managers) working directly with children in centre-based ELC settings **and coordinators supporting the work of childminders**, hold an appropriate degree-level qualification’.

As discussed in section 3.3, over the course of this Action Plan a quality development structure for childminders will be developed, which will include exploration of the possibility of staffed local networks of childminders. While unsupported local networks, e.g. peer support groups, have value in reducing isolation and providing a forum for sharing experiences, networks that are led by qualified practitioners are more likely to serve as vehicles for pedagogical leadership, continuing professional development, reflective practice, self-evaluation and teamwork.

While childminding structures are inevitably different, and childminders will not be required to achieve a Level 7 or 8 qualification (though some may choose to do so), the staffed local networks offer a means by which the benefits of graduate-led provision may be secured for childminders too.

Given their envisaged roles in pedagogical leadership and training and the understanding of childminding that will be required of them, it is expected that the graduate leaders who support the local childminding networks should have not only a relevant qualification at least at NFQ Level 7, but also a qualification or training that is specific to their role. For this purpose, it is proposed that a specific training programme should be developed that qualifies graduates to act as Childminding Network Leaders. Such a programme could build on the experience of the LINC programme for training of Inclusion Coordinators within early learning and care services as part of the AIM programme.

The tasks of the Advisory Group on Qualifications and Training for Childminders will therefore also include:

- Specifying the components, level and delivery model for a specific training programme for the role of Childminding Network Leader.

### **Other training**

A key commitment in the Action Plan is to ensure that all training that is required of providers of early learning and care or school-age childcare is available equally to centre-based providers and Tusla-registered childminders.

During Phase 1 of the Action Plan, when only a limited number of childminders are subject to regulation, relevant training will be extended – insofar as budgets allow – to non-registered childminders who may in Phase 2 become subject to regulation.

The cost and practicalities of making training more widely available (i.e. to all registered childminders) in Phase 2 of the Action Plan will be one of the factors taken into account in determining when to commence Phase 2. (Costs are considered in section 4 below.)

In extending training to a wider cohort of childminders, delivery mechanisms will need to reflect the fact that childminders work on their own and therefore are generally only available

for training in evenings or at weekends. Training courses that are available online, or that include an online element within a blended model, may be particularly suitable. (A similar consideration applies to training for sole traders who single-handedly deliver the ECCE programme, although such practitioners are likely to work a shorter working day than childminders.)

### ***Child Safeguarding Training***

A key element of child protection is *Children First* training for early learning and care and school-age childcare practitioners, which supports practitioners to identify concerns about children and the process of reporting such concerns if they arise.

In December 2017, the updated Children First Legislation was introduced. This legislation made it obligatory for all those working with children to develop and display a safeguarding statement. The National Early Years Children First Committee devised and oversees child safeguarding training that is delivered by City/County Childcare Committees. Childminders can and do undertake this training. Also under the auspices of the National Early Years Children First Committee, Childminding Ireland runs child safeguarding training that includes childminding-specific scenarios. As the number of registered childminders increases over the course of the Action Plan, the Committee will be asked to develop a plan for the wider delivery of childminder-specific child safeguarding training.

In addition to training that is specific to early learning and care and school-age childcare practitioners, Tusla has worked with DCYA and the HSE to develop a universal e-learning training programme called 'Introduction to Children First', which is a useful starting point for all those working with children, including childminders.

### ***First Aid Training***

From May 2018, the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) will only recognise the PHECC First Aid Response (FAR) Education and Training Standard as the national standard for occupational first aid in all workplaces. The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate will require all services to have at least one person on the premises at all times with a FAR qualification from May 2020.

Childminders will be supported with First Aid training. In September 2018, DCYA announced a plan to provide First Aid training to Early Learning and Care services to meet the new regulatory requirement. This plan is being implemented during 2019 and the first months of 2020, with one funded place being offered to each registered service when their first aid certification runs out. In addition to all centre-based services, funded training is also available for 250 childminders, including all currently registered childminders as well as some childminders who are not yet registered.

<b>Actions (Qualifications and training)</b>	
<b>Phase 1 – Consultation, research &amp; development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of and decision on qualification and training requirements, as part of the Workforce Development Plan.</li> <li>• Establishment of Advisory Group on Qualifications and Training.</li> <li>• Roll-out of child safeguarding training and first aid training to childminders likely to be subject to regulation in Phase 2.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2 – Transition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phasing in of new qualification and training requirements, with initial lower level requirement for duration of Phase 2.</li> <li>• Continued roll-out of child safeguarding training and first aid training.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3 – Full implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full qualification and training requirements.</li> <li>• New childminders establishing a service for the first time may be able to access a phased qualification requirement.</li> <li>• Support wider aim of a graduate-led workforce through childminding coordinators with graduate qualifications.</li> </ul>

### 3.3 Quality supports

Over the past decade, there has been a significant growth in investment in centre-based services delivering early learning and care and in school-age childcare. This investment has included initiatives to improve quality and ensure children’s safety and welfare through regulation, mentoring, training and wider supports for the quality of provision.

It is essential that all children, including those cared for by childminders, should be equally protected and supported. In addition to minimum qualification and training requirements for each childminder (considered in section 3.2 above), improvement of the quality of childminding provision will require a range of supports to be provided on an on-going basis, including:

- Mentoring
- CPD
- Advice
- Pedagogical leadership
- Peer exchange of learning and good practice

For centre-based early learning and care and school-age childcare providers, this mix of quality supports is provided through a combination of:

- Leadership and support roles within services (some of which is State-supported, e.g. the Inclusion Coordinator roles funded as part of the AIM programme).
- Mentoring and training provided by Better Start, including the mentoring supports provided by the Quality Development Service and the new Aistear and Play CPD programme being rolled out through Better Start as part of the National Síolta Aistear Initiative.

- Mentoring, advice and training provided by the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations.<sup>48</sup>
- Developmental and advisory supports provided by City and County Childcare Committees.
- Quality improvement supports provided through inspections, both the regulatory inspections carried out by Tusla and the education-focused inspections carried out by the DES Inspectorate.
- Curriculum and transition supports provided by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Currently, the on-going quality supports available to childminders are limited in scale (see below), and largely consist of support provided by Childminding Ireland (funded as one of the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations) and by the City / County Childcare Committees. A particular challenge facing childminders is their isolation and the absence of the leadership supports and teamwork that can be provided within many centre-based services.

During Phase 1 of the Action Plan, research and costings will be carried out into a range of options for delivery of on-going quality supports for childminders, and piloting will begin in Phase 2. The central aim will be to ensure that childminders are **fully integrated** into and able to benefit from all quality supports provided for early learning and care and for school-age childcare, in keeping with the core objective of bringing childminders into the mainstream of provision. As the national quality development infrastructure for centre-based services is likely to evolve over the decade ahead, as part of *First 5*, the supports available to childminders will evolve as part of the national quality development infrastructure.

In addition to possible extension of the current supports for childminders and possible adaptation of the supports provided to centre-based services by Better Start and by other National Voluntary Childcare Organisations, consideration will be given to introducing staffed local childminding networks (see below), which are in effect a means of reducing the isolation of childminders and linking them in to the types of leadership and peer supports available within centre-based services.

Isolation and lack of leadership supports and teamwork are challenges that small centre-based services (e.g. sessional ECCE services run single-handedly) may also experience. For this reason, consideration will also be given to models of support that may benefit small centre-based services at the same time as childminders.

The final decision as to which type of on-going quality support – or what hybrid / mix of supports – to provide to childminders will depend both on the research and costings in Phase 1 and on the outcome of the review of the operating system for early learning and care and school-age childcare that is to begin shortly as part of *First 5*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The following organisations receive State funding to provide quality supports for services providing early learning and care and school-age childcare: Barnardos, National Childminding Association of Ireland, National Childhood Network, Early Childhood Ireland, Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association, National Parents Council – Primary and St Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland.

<sup>49</sup> *First 5* includes a commitment to ‘review the operating system for ELC (and school-age childcare), at national and local level, to develop more consolidated and streamlined planning, funding, administration and quality support’.

### **Current supports**

Even in advance of regulatory change, there is an immediate need for information, advice and guidance to be made available to childminders, particularly information about current and changing regulatory requirements and funding opportunities. For this purpose, an additional €500,000 was secured in Budget 2019 to recruit a National Childminding Coordinator and a team of six Childminding Development Officers, to prepare the childminding sector for the move towards wider regulation and in the immediate term to support childminders who are subject to the current regulations but are not yet registered with Tusla to meet Tusla registration requirements, thus enabling more childminders to take part in the National Childcare Scheme when or soon after it opens. These additional supports are intended to supplement the supports for childminders already provided by City / County Childcare Committees, which were significantly reduced in scale following the loss of Childminding Advisory Officer posts in 2012/13.

The National Childminding Coordinator has been in post since April 2019. The six Childminding Development Officers, who are being recruited in mid-2019, will be located within City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs), and each will work with a regional cluster of CCCs. The Childminding Development Officers will also work with CCCs to help administer the legacy system of voluntary notification and the Childminder Development Grant (see section 3.4 below).

As one of the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations funded by DCYA, Childminding Ireland provides information, advice, guidance and training to its members. Its work continues to be a significant part of the range of supports available specifically to childminders.

Since 2016, the DES Inspectorate has carried out education-focused inspections of services delivering the ECCE programme, complementing the statutory inspections of all registered services that are carried out by Tusla. Of the 81 childminders currently registered with Tusla (and therefore subject to inspection by Tusla), 25 deliver the ECCE programme and therefore may also be subject to education-focused inspections by the DES Inspectorate. The registration of a new cohort of childminders in Phase 2 of the Action Plan may provide an opportunity for some of these childminders to deliver the ECCE Programme and therefore be included in the DES inspection process. In addition, during 2019-2020 the DES Inspectorate is preparing for and then piloting the expansion of education-focused inspections to all early learning and care services, for children from birth to 6 years old. This development means that the DES Inspectorate may carry out an increasing number of education-focused inspections of childminders during Phase 2 of the Action Plan.

The roles of both the Tusla early years inspectorate and the DES inspectorate in relation to childminders will be re-examined over the coming years in the light of the *First 5* commitment to consider options for reforms to the registration and inspection of early learning and care and school-age childcare, to ensure a proportionate inspection regime and a more integrated approach.

### **Staffed local networks**

Isolation is both a challenge experienced by childminders and a constraint on their professional development. Practitioners in centre-based services, particularly larger services, may benefit from teamwork, non-contact time for preparation and recording of observations of children's development, and supports provided by pedagogical leaders within the setting.

Such supports are not available to childminders who work single-handedly in their own homes.

To compensate, some jurisdictions have introduced a range of mechanisms by which childminders may link into local networks (see box). Such mechanisms may provide not only for peer exchange and an alternative location at which children may play and interact with other children as well as the opportunity to share resources (e.g. toys and equipment), but also for information, mentoring and training supports. It is this concept that is expressed by the term ‘**staffed local network**’, which was a recommendation of the Working Group. Research on the impact of such approaches shows significant potential benefits in improving the quality of childminding provision.<sup>50</sup>

It should be noted that similar issues arise for providers of small, sessional early learning and care services that are run single-handedly. Consideration will be given to the option of extending aspects of the delivery of staffed local networks to encompass such providers.

In exploring the development of staffed local networks for childminders across the country, it will be important to ensure that the **support / pedagogical leadership roles** within these networks are carried out by practitioners who are appropriately trained and supported, with a good understanding of practical aspects of childminding, the ability to offer pedagogical leadership, and evidence-based strategies that are part of an agreed national approach. While considerable further research is required on structures and approaches, it is envisaged that the staffed local networks would be coordinated by Better Start, to ensure a **consistent national approach**. (The development of training for the support / leadership roles is discussed in section 3.2 above.)

The development of staffed local networks would allow childminders to be included within the commitment made in *First 5* to move to a **graduate-led workforce** in early learning and care. Childminders will not be required to achieve Level 7 or 8 qualifications, though it is hoped that some may do so, and any financial supports and incentives for degree-level qualifications to be identified in the Workforce Development Plan should be available equally to childminders. Instead, it is proposed that the graduate-level leadership of the childminding sector should be achieved through the leaders of the local childminding networks, who may well have worked as childminders.

Participation in staffed local networks could eventually become a requirement for childminders, either as a regulatory requirement or as a contractual requirement to receive State funding, but this could only happen at a point in time when the local networks are sufficiently widespread that all childminders have an opportunity to participate. Such a step would therefore only be possible during the course of Phase 3 or even after completion of this 10-year Action Plan.

In addition to the need for leadership by a practitioner with suitable training and support, if such networks are to provide meeting spaces for childminders and/or spaces in which childminders can bring children together for social interaction and wider experiences, then networks need a suitable **physical location**. A range of options will be explored during Phase

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<sup>50</sup> Otero, M. and Melhuish E. (2015) *Study of Early Education and Development (SEED): Study of the Quality of Childminder Provision in England*.

1. Consideration will be given to basing some networks within centre-based services (where those services have appropriate facilities), with the support / pedagogical leadership role provided by suitably trained personnel.

Depending on the local scale of childminding provision, and the range of supports to be provided, the role of Childminding Network Leader might in some instances be a part-time role that could be combined with other roles within a centre-based service, though even if located in a centre-based service the Network Leader might themselves have been a childminder, and other childminder-led models will also be examined. As part of the **new funding model**, it is anticipated that in some instances if centre-based services were to provide support in some form to local childminding networks they might require funding that reflects this role. It is not expected that all centre-based services would support local childminding networks. Participation by a centre-based service would depend on the service's capacity and the availability of suitably qualified staff.

This approach, which may form part of the new funding model for early learning and care and school-age childcare announced in *First 5*, may allow gradual development over time of an integrated model of provision, in which childminders and centre-based services are connected at local level through the development of local networks, and in which the current divide between childminding and centre-based provision is broken down.

A partnership relationship between local childminders and centre-based services could extend beyond quality supports. It could, for example, open up opportunities for local childminders and centre-based services to coordinate the services they offer, e.g. a centre-based service might work with local childminders who offer care for younger children than is available in the centre-based service or who offer wrap-around care that fits around the service offered by the centre-based service. However, it is not envisaged that this coordinated or integrated delivery model would be a requirement.

This possibility links to the *First 5* commitment to 'Pilot the development of models of local ELC [early learning and care] collaboratives to better address governance and sustainability in ELC, in partnership with community and private providers... The pilot will establish local ELC collaboratives, i.e. geographical cluster networks of providers through which cooperation structures can emerge. Special incentives for including childminders will be considered.'

## Local childminding networks in selected jurisdictions

In England, local authorities run Quality Assurance Schemes, in which childminders who join the scheme benefit from a range of quality supports, including mentoring, training and advice, as well as opportunities for interaction with other childminders. The network coordinators may be based in Children’s Centres, which were introduced in the early 2000s, and which deliver a range of services, including parenting support, ‘stay and play’ sessions for parents and young children, health services, and early learning and care services. Some Centres run childminding networks, or coordinate with other agencies which deliver such networks, in order to provide a more joined-up service for parents.

In France, childminders supply a significant proportion of childcare for under-threes. In an effort to improve the quality of care delivered by childminders, the French government encouraged local authorities to set up *Relais Assistances Maternelles* (RAMs), or childminding support centres. They offer childminders the opportunity to meet other childminders, receive advice and support on child development and practical matters, and take part in joint activities for the children they care for. RAMs also provide advice to parents, e.g. on finding childcare. There are around 500 RAMs in France (roughly one per 130,000 people).

Sources: Wheaton B., Harding C. (2017). *International childcare comparisons*. London: Coram Family and Childcare Trust; Joy, S., La Valle, I., Smith, T., Sylva, K., Mathers, S., Dearden, L., Goodman, A., Kaplan, G. (2004). *Wraparound care: a model of integrated provision, final report for the Department for Education and Skills*. U.K.: National Centre for Social Research, University of Oxford, Institute for Fiscal Studies.

### Actions (On-going quality supports)

<b>Phase 1 – Preparatory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and exploration of options for childminding supports through existing structures (including Better Start and the inspectorates) and new options (e.g. staffed local childminding networks), linked to the review of operating systems for ELC and SAC.</li> <li>• Research into staffed local childminding networks, linked to the development of new funding model under <i>First 5</i>.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2 – Transition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion in inspection services.</li> <li>• Extension and reform of quality supports for childminders.</li> <li>• Piloting and phased introduction of staffed local childminding networks, depending on outcome of Phase 1 research.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3 – Full implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of quality supports on equal footing to childminders and centre-based providers.</li> <li>• Roll-out of staffed local childminding networks, potentially linked to roll-out of new funding model for ELC and SAC settings.</li> </ul>

### **3.4 Funding and financial supports**

A number of financial supports are already available for childminders, including the Childminder Development Grant and the Childcare Services Tax Relief. While in principle the main funding schemes for services delivering early learning and care and school-age childcare – ECCE and CCSP (which is soon to be replaced by the National Childcare Scheme) – are already open to childminders, in practice the very limited number of registered childminders and the scheme rules mean that very few childminders are part of the schemes.

The Action Plan will involve opening up funding schemes more widely to childminders, as part of the wider regulation and mainstreaming of childminding, as well as providing dedicated funding to support childminders to upskill and meet regulatory requirements.

#### **National Childcare Scheme**

The National Childcare Scheme, which will open to applications from parents shortly, will replace all existing targeted subsidy schemes for early learning and care and school-age childcare, as well as the universal subsidy available for children under 3 years old.

The Childcare Support Act 2018, which provides a statutory basis for the National Childcare Scheme, specifies that only Tusla-registered providers will be eligible to participate in the Scheme. This requirement is a key impetus lying behind this Action Plan, given the need to extend Tusla-registration to a much wider cohort of childminders if the policy intention of supporting parental choice and allowing a choice of registered provider is to be achieved. It also creates a unique opportunity to bring childminders into mainstream provision, given the financial incentive for childminders of participation in the National Childcare Scheme.

In addition to Tusla registration, there will also be contractual requirements which any participating provider – whether centre-based or a childminder – must meet in order to participate in the National Childcare Scheme, e.g. compliance with scheme rules in relation to registering children and reporting material variations in children’s attendance.

Given the current legal exclusions from registration for many childminders, the number of childminders expected to take part in the National Childcare Scheme during Phase 1 of the Action Plan is low. However, it is hoped that the financial incentive to participate in the scheme, combined with the work of the Childminding Development Officers to be appointed during 2019, will see an increase in the number of childminders delivering State-subsidised early learning and care and school-age childcare from the current base of 81 registered childminders.

A larger increase in the number of childminders taking part in the National Childcare Scheme is only likely to take place during Phase 2 of the Action Plan, after the scope of regulation is extended. The consequent increase in the cost of delivering the National Childcare Scheme due to the higher number of children and families benefiting from subsidies (considered further in Section 4 below) will be a significant factor in determining the timing of the start of Phase 2.

While childminders who meet transitional qualification requirements (and are registered with Tusla) will be able to take part in the National Childcare Scheme during Phase 2 of the Action Plan, in Phase 3 childminders will be required to meet the full qualification

requirements to be determined (other than those childminders who avail of any ‘grandfathering’ arrangement that is put in place).

Research to be carried out in Phase 1 on the number of childminders likely to remain in the sector will include further research on the cost of delivery of childminding services, complementing the Independent Review of the Cost of Childcare, to determine whether any adjustment is required to subsidy rates under the National Childcare Scheme in relation to childminders. Preparatory actions in Phase 1 will also include review of the contractual and compliance requirements for participation in the National Childcare Scheme to ensure they are appropriate for the extension of regulation to all paid, non-relative childminders.

Childminders taking part in the National Childcare Scheme would also benefit from Programme Support Payments made available to providers taking part in the scheme.

### **ECCE or universal pre-school programme**

The ECCE or universal pre-school programme is in principle already open to childminders. However, programme rules require that:

- A provider must be registered with Tusla.
- A child-minder must have five ECCE-eligible children.
- As a childminder is acting as ‘room leader’, the childminder must, at a minimum, hold a qualification that meets the ECCE Room Leader requirements, e.g. a relevant qualification at Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

In practice, very few childminders qualify to offer ECCE. Currently, only 25 childminders are in contract to provide ECCE with 220 children taking part in the ECCE programme through a childminder (which reflects the possibility that a single childminder – just like a sessional pre-school service – may run separate morning and afternoon ECCE sessions with different groups of children).

Unlike the National Childcare Scheme, ECCE has an explicit educational objective, which limits the scale and character of services that can provide the programme. This concern has underpinned the limits currently set. However, further research is required to determine whether these limits will remain appropriate in the context of the widening of regulation to more childminders over the course of the Action Plan.

Phase 1 of the Action Plan will therefore include research on what limits should be in place in relation to the participation of childminders within the ECCE programme.

### **Learner Fund**

In September 2018, DCYA announced a Learner Fund for childminders who achieve a level 5 major award in early childhood care and education and who register with Tusla. This scheme may continue in its present form during Phase 1 of this Action Plan, as childminders operate within the existing regulatory framework. The Learner Fund may then be extended to support childminders to achieve new qualification and training requirements as described in the qualifications section of this report. Childminders will also be given the opportunity to upskill to level 7 and 8, e.g. to become local childminding coordinators in order to support staffed local childminding networks.

The Learner Fund is a funding stream offered by DCYA to practitioners working in early learning and care and school-age childcare seeking to upskill and gain higher qualifications.

It has operated for several years by providing either pre-award funding or a post-award bursary. The initiative was initially rolled-out when the minimum NFQ Level 5 qualification requirement was introduced in the Early Years Regulations 2016, to allow practitioners who were already working in a setting to meet the new minimum requirement. Since then, the Learner Fund has been broadened to provide financial support for practitioners undertaking a range of other training and education programmes, including for NFQ Level 6, 7 and 8 awards.

In September 2018, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced that an initial Learner Fund bursary would be made available to childminders who have achieved a relevant Level 5 qualification provided they register with Tusla, to support childminders on a path towards professionalization and registration. This measure is intended both to incentivise childminders who already have a Level 5 qualification to register with Tusla, and also to incentivise other childminders to complete Level 5 studies. It is planned that applications for the new Level 5 bursary will be opened to childminders in the second half of 2019.

While the new bursary is being introduced in advance of a decision on future qualification requirements for childminders, it is hoped that the measure will support a short-term increase in the number of childminders able to take part in the National Childcare Scheme, while also supporting the longer-term professional development within the childminding sector.

Once future qualification and training requirements for childminders have been determined, the Learner Fund will be further extended to provide financial supports for childminders to meet qualification and training requirements and to provide a pathway to professional development for childminders.

### **Childminding Development Grant**

The Childminding Development Grant was introduced in 2009 to support childminders through providing small grants for equipment, complementing a significant capital investment going into centre-based services at the time. The scheme, which is administered by City and County Childcare Committees, provides grants to childminders of up to €1,000 per childminder who fully meets the criteria of the scheme. The grant may provide up to 90% of total receipted eligible expenditure.

The Childminding Development Grant is open to Tusla-registered childminders, childminders who have voluntarily notified their City/County Childcare Committee, childminders proposing a new childminding service and childminders who have completed the childminding Quality Awareness Programme. The childminder or potential childminder must mind at least 3 children on a part-time basis or one child on a full-time basis and one part-time. In order to receive the maximum grant available, a childminder must have appropriate insurance and undertake to stay in operation for two years after the date of the grant. If a childminder only gives a shorter time-commitment, the grant is reduced accordingly.

In Phase 1 of the Action Plan, the Advisory Group on Financial Supports for Childminders will review the effectiveness of this grant and recommend adjustments to improve its effectiveness and impact.

The Advisory Group on Financial Supports will also consider the scope for childminders to benefit from additional investment from the National Development Plan 2018-2027, e.g. through a reformed and expanded Childminding Development Grant.

## **Tax relief**

The Childcare Services Relief, introduced in 2006, incentivises childminders who fall outside the scope of regulation to enter the formal economy and to voluntarily notify their City / County Childcare Committee. It allows voluntary notified childminders who care for a maximum of three children at any one time (of any age, and excluding the childminder's own children) to receive up to €15,000 in childminding income tax-free, provided the childminder declares this income to Revenue. (The €15,000 limit relates to revenue from childminding, not to profits. If the childminding income exceeds €15,000 in a year, the full amount is taxable, subject to the childminder's personal tax credits and other allowances.)

The most recent data available from Revenue indicates that 690 exemptions were granted under the Childcare Services Relief in 2016. The cost of the tax relief to the Exchequer in foregone tax revenues was €1.5 million in 2016.

Although the number of childminders benefiting from the tax relief is low in comparison with the total number of childminders thought to be operating, it is an increase on the 230 beneficiaries in 2006 when the tax relief was first introduced. The total number of tax exemptions provided under the relief over the 10-year period is 5,680, at a total cost to the Exchequer of €10.5 million.

The Childcare Services Tax Relief was intended to support childminders who could not register with Tusla (or, previously, notify the HSE) and who might otherwise have had limited incentive to enter the formal economy. The context will change in Phase 2 of the Childminding Action Plan when many more childminders will be able to register with Tusla. However, there is no direct financial benefit of registration for childminders as, while Tusla-registration will allow a childminder to participate in the National Childcare Scheme, National Childcare Scheme subsidies must be fully passed on to parents in reduced fees. While the context will change, the tax relief could therefore continue to provide a positive incentive to childminders to enter the formal economy.

While taxation policy is a matter for the Minister for Finance, during Phase 1 of the Childminding Action Plan the Advisory Group on Funding and Financial Supports for Childminders will take the tax relief into account when making its recommendations on the reform of the range of financial supports available for childminders.

<b>Actions (Funding and financial supports)</b>	
<b>Phase 1 – Consultation, research &amp; development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishment of Advisory Group on Funding and Financial Supports.</li><li>• Support childminders who can meet current regulatory requirements to participate in the National Childcare Scheme, including through the Childminder Learner Fund.</li><li>• Review of other financial supports.</li></ul>
<b>Phase 2 – Transition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• National Childcare Scheme open to all childminders who meet the transitional regulatory requirements.</li><li>• Phased reform of other financial supports.</li></ul>
<b>Phase 3 – Full implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• National Childcare Scheme open to all childminders who meet the full regulatory requirements.</li><li>• Completion of reform of other financial supports.</li></ul>

## 4. Costs

Costs arising from the Action Plan comprise:

- Direct costs (discussed in section 4.1) of measures identified to support childminders to achieve regulatory requirements and to incorporate childminders within mainstream supports for the quality and accessibility of services, including an increase in the size of the statutory regulator (Tusla), training supports through the Learner Fund, and expansion of the quality development infrastructure.
- Indirect costs (discussed in section 4.2) of opening up funding schemes, in particular the National Childcare Scheme, to a wider cohort of childminders.

While the direct costs are significant, by far the largest share of costs is indirect, especially associated with more families benefiting from the National Childcare Scheme. While the direct costs will begin to arise during the course of Phase 1 (with the speed at which they arise depending on the duration of Phase 1), the indirect costs will only arise during the course of Phase 2 as they will only begin after the changes to primary legislation and regulations. For this reason, the timing of the transition to Phase 2 will be budget-dependent and will be agreed with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform prior to any decision being made.

Costs arising from the Action Plan will be offset by increased labour market participation resulting from wider access to National Childcare Scheme subsidies, by increased tax revenues resulting from an increase in the number of childminders entering the formal economy and, in the longer term, by improved child outcomes resulting from increases in the quality of provision. Offsetting savings are discussed in section 4.3.

### **Assumptions and scenarios**

All cost estimates in this section are indicative and provisional and will be subject to further examination during Phase 1 of the Action Plan.

As discussed in section 1.3, there is considerable uncertainty about the number of childminders working in the country. It is also not known what proportion of childminders are likely to remain working in the sector in the event of a move to wider regulation and the introduction of a new training and qualification requirement.

For the purposes of cost estimates presented here, it is assumed that the number of children currently cared for by a childminder, nanny or au pair would remain unchanged at approx. 84,000. However, it is not known what proportion of these children are cared for by childminders as opposed to nannies / au pairs (who will not be included within the scope of wider regulation). As discussed in section 1.3, at an outer limit this figure may imply up to 19,400 childminders, but the actual number is likely to be significantly lower than this.

It is also likely that a significant proportion of childminders would choose not to take up the opportunity presented by regulation and mainstreaming of the childminding sector, and would stop working as childminders. The higher the qualification requirement specified for childminders, the smaller the number of childminders expected to remain in the sector.

To judge the likely number of regulated childminders, comparison is made here with other jurisdictions that regulate all childminders and in which the nature of childcare provision (its extent, the role of the private sector, and the balance between home and centre-based care) is

broadly similar to that in Ireland. The table below presents the number of childminders in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the total number of 0-15 year olds in each jurisdiction, and the implied number of 0-15 year olds per registered childminder.

	<b>Number of registered childminders</b>	<b>Population aged 0-15</b>	<b>0-15 year olds per registered childminder</b>
England	39,157	10.048 million	257
Scotland	4,961	864,000	174
Wales	1,890	527,000	279
Northern Ireland	2,720	368,000	135

*Sources: The Care Inspectorate Register, Scotland; The Care Inspectorate Register, Wales; Ofsted; Family Support NI; Population Statistics – Office of National Statistics [GB]*

Given Ireland’s current estimated population of 1.1 million 0-15 year olds,<sup>51</sup> the experience of these four jurisdictions suggests Ireland might expect to see between 3,608 (i.e. 1 per 279 0-15 year olds) and 7,456 (i.e. 1 per 135) regulated childminders following the move to full regulation, i.e. between 19% and 39% of the number currently working as childminders, au pairs and nannies.

On this basis, the **core scenario** adopted in each of the costings below is **5,000** regulated childminders, i.e. approx. 25% of the number currently working as childminders, au pairs and nannies. In addition, a **higher scenario** is also considered in each of the costings below, in which the number of regulated childminders is double the core scenario, i.e. **10,000** childminders (or 50% of the number currently working as childminders, au pairs and nannies).

## 4.1 Direct costs

### **Registration and inspection of childminders**

The legal exemptions from regulation will be ended in Phase 2 of the Action Plan and childminder-specific regulations will then come into force. At that point it will be necessary for Tusla to register childminders and begin a programme of inspections to assess childminders’ continuing compliance with regulations. These expanded registration and inspection roles will require an expansion in the size of the Tusla Children’s Services Regulation division.

While the inspection model for childminders has not yet been determined, for the purpose of an indicative cost estimate it is assumed that an inspection of a childminder would take 0.5 days (compared to the average 1 day per centre-based service) and that the frequency of inspections would be the same as for centre-based services (i.e. on average each childminder would be inspected once every 3 years). On this basis, in the **core scenario** the additional cost to the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate would be **€2.3m per annum**, while the additional cost in the higher scenario would be €4.6m per annum.

<sup>51</sup> CSO population estimate for 2018.

Currently the DES Inspectorate’s work with early learning and care services comprises only education-focused inspections of services delivering the ECCE programme. There are only 25 childminders delivering ECCE at present, and unless ECCE rules change it is not expected that this number will rise significantly, so the DES Inspectorate requirements in relation to inspection of childminders delivering ECCE will remain limited. However, *First 5* contains a commitment to pilot the extension of education-focused inspections to children under three, which would result in inspections of childminders. As an inspection model for this group has not yet been developed, it is not possible to provide a firm cost estimate.

### **Learner Fund**

The costings below represent a range of estimates of the once-off costs of providing subsidised training to bring regulated childminders up to the full qualification requirement to come into force in Phase 3 of the Action Plan. This cost would be spread over a period of approx. 5 years, commencing during the course of Phase 1 and continuing through Phase 2.

Three cost figures are used per childminder, with the cost of training depending on the qualification requirement to be specified and the cost of achieving this qualification. It is not intended that the subsidy would cover the full cost of the training for all participants. €1,200 (option A) was the Learner Fund subsidy provided to practitioners in centre-based staff to achieve the full Level 5 qualification that came into force in 2017. €750 (Option B) was the Learner Fund subsidy provided as a contribution to help meet the costs for practitioners who have achieved relevant Level 7 or 8 awards. €500 (Option C) represents the potential cost per childminder of a training programme of shorter duration.

Each of the costings assumes that the 315 childminders known to Childminding Ireland who already have a full Level 5 or Level 6 award in Early Childhood Care and Education would not need any further qualification.

Under the **core scenario**, the total cost of a €750 subsidy per childminder is estimated as €3.5m, implying a cost of **€700,000 per annum** if spread over 5 years.

	<b>Option A: €1,200 subsidy</b>	<b>Option B: €750 subsidy</b>	<b>Option C: €500 subsidy</b>
<b>Core scenario</b>	€5.6m	€3.5m	€2.4m
<b>Higher scenario</b>	€11.6m	€7.3m	€4.9m

### **First Aid for Childminders**

As with the Learner Fund, the costings below represent once-off costs of providing first aid training to all childminders who fall within the scope of regulation, in order to meet regulatory requirements. As first aid is likely to be a regulatory requirement from the outset, i.e. from the beginning of Phase 2 of the Action Plan, this cost would be spread over a shorter time period of up to 3 years. The €225 subsidy per childminder is the same level of subsidy as is currently being provided for Occupational First Aid training for centre-based practitioners. As a financial commitment has already been made to provide Occupational First Aid training to 250 childminders in 2019-20, this cost is deducted from the total cost. In the **core scenario** the cost of first aid training would amount to €1.1m, or **€350,000 per annum** if spread over 3 years. In the higher cost scenario, the total cost would amount to €2.2m.

### **Quality supports**

As discussed in section 3.3 above, Phase 1 of the Action Plan will involve research, exploration and costings of options in relation to the future delivery of on-going quality supports, including mentoring, advice, pedagogical leadership and peer support. Consideration of the options will take into account the outcome of the forthcoming review of operating systems.

In advance of this research taking place, it is not possible to provide detailed cost estimates. To provide a broad indication of the order of magnitude of costs, comparison may be made with the cost of on-going quality supports for centre-based services. (While the small size of each childminding service may reduce the support-cost per childminder relative to that per centre-based service, the lack of historic supports for childminders and the need to create new opportunities for team-work and peer support may increase the support-cost per childminder relative to that per centre-based service.)

Current on-going quality supports for centre-based services include annual funding for Better Start's Quality Development Service and a proportion of public funding provided to the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations and City / County Childcare Committees, which in addition to quality supports carry out administrative, information and advisory functions, including provision of information to parents. Taking into account a proportion of the public funding provided to each of these organisations,<sup>52</sup> a cost per service may be estimated.

If the cost of on-going quality supports were the same for childminders as for centre-based settings, the annual cost in the **core scenario** would be **€11m per annum**, while the annual cost in the higher scenario would be €22m.

It should be noted that the quality development infrastructure for centre-based services is being incrementally expanded in scale and scope, in order to raise the quality of provision for all children. Further reform and/or expansion of the range of quality supports provided would impact on the cost of fully opening up such quality supports to childminders.

### **Childminding Development Grant**

The Childminding Development Grant is part of the capital budget, and operates within a fixed annual budget, rather than being demand-led. It is currently limited to €250,000 in total per annum, with a cap of €1,000 per childminder, though actual expenditure has been less than this in recent years. Assuming the grant scheme were doubled in capacity to a maximum €500,000, retaining a cap of €1,000 per childminder, thus allowing approx. 500 childminders to benefit each year, the additional cost would be **€250,000 per annum**.

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<sup>52</sup> A preliminary and very approximate estimate of the cost of quality supports is derived by combining: the full cost of the Better Start Quality Delivery Service; 1/3 of the funding of National Voluntary Childcare Organisations, on the basis that quality support is one of three key objectives in their annual plan for the use of public funds; and 1/2 of the funding of City/County Childcare Committees, on the basis that half the actions in their annual implementation plans are quality-related.

## 4.2 Indirect costs

### National Childcare Scheme

Estimates of the impact of the opening of regulation – and therefore the National Childcare Scheme – to all paid, non-relative childminders come from two sources:

- The DCYA cost model for the National Childcare Scheme, which draws on administrative (Pobal) data on current usage of centre-based services as well as CSO survey data on childcare usage, population by age, and income-levels. The DCYA cost model includes an estimate of the ‘dynamic’ effect of the Scheme on parents’ childcare choices.
- The ESRI’s SWITCH model, which allows for ‘static’ cost estimates of the National Childcare Scheme, based on the CSO’s SILC dataset, which includes questions to parents on use of childminders.

Additional costs for the National Childcare Scheme would primarily arise during Phase 2 of the Action Plan, after Tusla-registration has been opened to a wider cohort of childminders.

Taking into account both the DCYA and the SWITCH cost models, it is estimated that the additional cost (over and above the estimated annual full-year cost of the National Childcare Scheme of €209m) of widening the scope of regulation to allow childminders to take part in the National Childcare Scheme would be **€16m per annum in the core scenario**, with the **parents of an estimated 6,500 children** benefiting from subsidies who would not otherwise benefit.<sup>53</sup> It is estimated that the additional cost in the higher scenario would be approx. €36m per annum, with the parents of an estimated 16,500 children benefiting from subsidies who would not otherwise benefit.

### ECCE

It is assumed that the wider regulation of childminders would not impact on the overall costs of the ECCE programme, as there is nearly full coverage of the ECCE programme (96% of children of ECCE-eligible age) and the shortfall in numbers does not appear to reflect lack of involvement of childminders in the programme. It is likely, therefore, that any increase in the number of children taking part in ECCE through a childminder would see an equivalent reduction in the number of children taking part in ECCE in a centre-based service.

## 4.3 Offsetting savings

Increased labour market participation as a result of wider access to the National Childcare Scheme is expected to increase tax returns. In addition, tax returns will also rise with an expected increase in the number of childminders declaring taxable income to Revenue, as it will be a requirement of participation in public funding schemes – including the National Childcare Scheme – that childminders are tax-compliant, and it is assumed that a proportion of childminders are currently in the informal economy and would move into the formal economy.

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<sup>53</sup> While the core scenario involves an assumption that 25% of current childminders would remain in the sector, it is estimated that approx. 8% of children cared for by childminders would benefit from subsidies under the National Childcare Scheme, given the children’s ages and the income-profile of parents who use childminders.

To provide a conservative estimate of these benefits, for the purpose of this Action Plan the estimate of tax savings is limited to the impact of wider tax-compliance. While the level of tax paid by many childminders is likely to be low (given low average incomes), where childminders were previously in the informal economy any such tax paid would be a net gain for the Exchequer compared to the current situation. The estimates that follow exclude the 81 childminders already registered with Tusla and the approx. 690 childminders availing of the Childcare Services Tax Relief, as these childminders are already very likely to be tax-compliant. In addition, the estimates involve an assumption that half of the remaining childminders are also already tax-compliant.

On the basis that on average weekly fees are €96 per child,<sup>54</sup> and that childminders on average mind 4 children for an estimated 48 weeks per annum, it is estimated that in the core scenario there would be up to an additional €1.9m per annum in tax returns to the State. In the higher scenario, this figure would rise to €4.3m.

Given the Childcare Services Tax Relief, for the purpose of a net cost estimate in section 4.2 below it is assumed that the additional tax return to the Exchequer from Phase 2 of the Action Plan onwards would be half the potential additional tax return, i.e. **€1.0m per annum** in the core scenario, or €2.1m in the higher scenario.

## 4.4 Total net costs

Taking into account both the expected costs (sections 4.1 and 4.2) and the offsetting additional tax returns expected to arise (section 4.3), it is estimated the total net cost of the proposals set out in this Action Plan would be **€26m per annum** during **Phase 3**, which would represent a **4.5% increase** in annual public spending on early learning and care and school-age childcare. (In the higher cost scenario, which assumes double the number of registered childminders, the net cost would be €56m per annum.)

*First 5* commits to at least doubling investment in Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare by 2028, from the 2018 baseline of €487m, reflecting the historically low level of investment in the sector by international standards. It is envisaged that the cost of regulating childminders would be met from this increase. In addition, the possibility of using EU Structural Funds to support upskilling of the workforce for early learning and care and school-age childcare, including childminders, will be examined.

During **Phase 1**, there will be limited preparatory costs. Subject to agreement in the Estimates process, these may include: extension of the Childminder Learner Fund (after agreement on qualification and training requirements to be phased in); child safeguarding training; first aid training; expansion of a reformed Childminding Development Grant; costs associated with research and consultation on the adjustment to regulations; and costs of research and piloting of new models of quality supports for childminders (including staffed local networks).

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<sup>54</sup> Source: Central Statistics Office (2016) *Quarterly National Household Survey Childcare Quarter 3, 2016*. While the average full-time weekly fee is €178, many children are only part-time. Average childcare use is 27 hours per week for pre-school children, and 14 per week for primary school children. A similar weekly average cost (€105.40) was found in the survey of parents who use childminders that was undertaken by the Working Group.

Assuming costs of research, consultation and piloting of approx. €0.5m per annum (to be further refined during initial planning actions), it is estimated that Phase 1 costs could be in the region of **€1.8m per annum** in the core scenario, or **€3m per annum** in the higher scenario (which assumes higher-than-expected take-up of a Learner Fund and other training options, preparatory to extension of regulation in Phase 2).

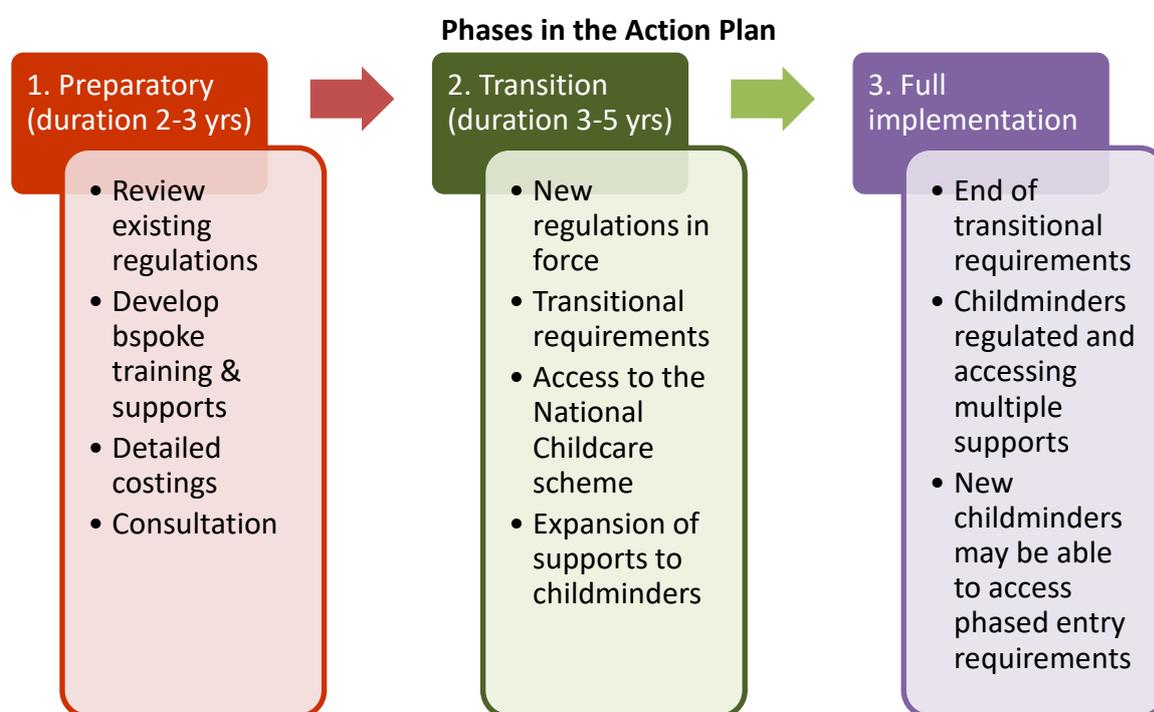
During **Phase 2**, the transition phase, when costs may be higher than in Phase 3 as a result of additional Learner Fund costs arising from the once-off cost of training the current cohort of unregulated childminders, it is estimated that the net cost of the proposals would be **€27m per annum** in the core scenario and €58m in the higher scenario.

<b>Actions (Cost analysis)</b>	
<b>Phase 1 – Preparatory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further research and analysis on numbers of childminders likely to come within the scope of regulation.</li> <li>• Further cost estimates on Phase 2 and 3 actions.</li> <li>• Preparation of Regulatory Impact Assessment.</li> </ul>

## 5. Implementation

### 5.1 Timeline

Given the scale of change involved, and the challenge of moving thousands of childminders out of the informal economy, with potentially large financial implications for public funding schemes, the Action Plan necessarily involves a phased approach, as described under each of the action areas in section 3 above. Given the uncertainty about the number of childminders likely to fall within the scope of regulation, and consequent uncertainty about the cost of Phase 2 and Phase 3 measures, the duration of each Phase will only be determined during the course of Phase 1, when initial decisions have been taken on regulatory requirements and when there is greater clarity on costs. In summary:



#### ***Phase 1: Preparatory – Consultation, research and development***

Phase 1 will involve detailed planning and putting in place the building blocks for the transition. In particular, Phase 1 will involve developing regulations specific and appropriate to childminders, which will come into effect in Phase 2. As the new regulations will not yet be in effect, the current regulations – and legal exemptions from regulation of most childminders – will remain in place during Phase 1.

Phase 1 is expected to last 2-3 years, but its duration will depend on more detailed costing and budget availability.

Phase 1 will also involve research and more detailed planning of actions to commence in Phases 2 and 3 (including, for example, development of childminder-specific training and reforms to the quality development infrastructure for childminders), as well as further research and analysis to inform more detailed cost estimates of actions in Phases 2 and 3.

### ***Phase 2: Transition phase***

Phase 2 will be a transition phase in which a significantly increased number of childminders will be able to register with Tusla and take part in State funding schemes, while benefiting from training and supports to progressively meet regulatory requirements and build the foundations of quality and professional development. During this transition phase, the regulatory requirements – particularly requirements for training / qualifications – will be less onerous than full regulation in Phase 3.

Phase 2, which is expected to last between 3 and 5 years, will commence when the current legal exemptions from regulation are ended and new childminder-specific regulations come into force. The timing of this change will be budget-dependent and subject to agreement with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, given the likely increase in the cost of the National Childcare Scheme due to a significant number of additional families benefiting, and the cost of additional registration / inspection and professional development resources.

### ***Phase 3: Full implementation phase***

Phase 3 will involve regulatory requirements coming fully into force. Phase 3 will begin between 5 and 8 years after the beginning of the Action Plan, with the precise date to be estimated in Phase 1 during development of regulations and planning of the timeline for transition to full regulatory requirements. In Phase 3, childminding will be fully mainstreamed into all quality and funding infrastructure for early learning and care and for school-age childcare.

## **5.2 Consultation and communications**

A significant amount of **consultation** has already been carried out to inform development of this Draft Action Plan, both through the Working Group – which drew on consultations with children, parents and childminders (see section 1.5 above) – and through wider consultation processes that informed overall policy direction towards childminding, e.g. the consultations that underpinned *First 5*. But the scale of reform involved in this Action Plan will require further consultation, both initially on the overall approach being proposed and then during development of regulations specific to the home environment.

A significant communications effort will also be required to ensure that childminders, parents and other stakeholders are well informed about the changes being made and the benefits that will accrue.

An Advisory Group on Consultation and Communications will be formed during Phase 1 to support DCYA in the development and implementation of a **consultation and communications strategy**. This Advisory Group and the strategy it will help develop will both support overall communications in relation to the Action Plan, and support other Advisory Groups to ensure that proposals they make (e.g. on regulations) are underpinned by public consultation.

Communication activities will also include the **promotion of childminding as a career**, particularly in the context of the increasing support for childminding as a profession during the course of the Action Plan. The promotion of childminding as a career will form part of the wider effort to raise the profile of careers in early learning and care and in school-age

childcare, which is a *First 5* commitment and will form part of the Workforce Development Plan.

While **nannies and au pairs** will not be included within the scope of regulation or of financial supports, the consultation and communications strategy will include development of a range of information / training resources in relation to the use nannies or au pairs. These information supports will address both legal requirements under employment law and tips for parents on what to look for in terms of quality of care and learning experiences that nannies and au pairs may offer.

In this regard, the consultation and communications strategy will contribute to the *First 5* commitment to ‘Develop guidance and information for parents and families on ELC [early learning and care] (and school-age childcare), including information on ELC (and school-age childcare) options and entitlements and guidance on key indicators of high-quality provision’.

### 5.3 Oversight and delivery

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) will lead on the initial consultation on the draft Action Plan and the preparation of a final Plan for the approval of Government. A **Steering Committee** will then be appointed to oversee implementation of the Action Plan. The Steering Committee will be chaired by DCYA, and will include representation of childminders, parents and other key stakeholders within the early learning and care and school-age childcare sectors.

DCYA recently appointed a **National Childminding Coordinator**, who will support the DCYA Early Years Quality Unit with the implementation of Phase 1 of the Action Plan. The National Childminding Coordinator will be a member of the Steering Committee. The Coordinator will have two main roles: firstly to manage a team of six **Childminding Development Officers** (to be recruited in mid-2019, and to be located within City/County Childcare Committees, each working with a cluster of CCCs), and secondly to support implementation of Phase 1 of the Action Plan at national level.

During Phase 1, four **Advisory Groups** will be formed and will meet, under the auspices of the Steering Committee, and will work with DCYA officials in relation to the following:

- A. *Regulation and Inspection* – content of childminder-specific regulations, including implications of the home environment.
- B. *Qualifications and Training* – qualification requirements for childminders (both during the transition phase and the full requirements), award standards, training (both for childminders and for new local childminding coordinator roles), and ‘grandfathering’ arrangements. (Qualification requirements themselves will be determined within the context of the Workforce Development Plan, and this advisory group will therefore liaise closely with the steering group for the Workforce Development Plan.)
- C. *Funding and Financial Supports* – including review of the Learner Fund and Childminding Development Grant.
- D. *Consultation and Communications* – to develop a consultation and communications strategy for the Action Plan, including consultation during development of specific

actions in Phase 1, communication of reform measures, and information / training resources on the use of nannies and au pairs.

Further research and analysis will be carried out during the course of Phase 1 on the number of childminders likely to fall within the scope of regulation and take part in funding schemes from Phase 2 onwards, to inform **cost estimates** of the transition to Phase 2 and a **Regulatory Impact Assessment**. As noted in section 5.1, the timing of the move to Phase 2 (marked by the commencement of changes to the Child Care Act 1991 and commencement of new childminder-specific regulations) will be dependent on further cost analysis and approval by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

# Annex: Working Group report – Summary of Proposals

## Legislation

1. Amend the Child Care Act, 1991, S.58 to allow for the inclusion of the following more comprehensive definition of childminding services in the Early Years regulations (2016). ‘Childminding service’ means a childcare service, which may include an overnight service, offered by a person who single-handedly takes care of children aged from 0-15 years old, which may include the person’s own children, in the person’s home for payment for a total of more than 2 hours per day.
2. Amend the extended definition of early years services in the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, S.92, (which amended the Child Care Act, 1991, part VII) in order to include school aged childcare up to age 15, raising the age limit to align with the upper child age threshold for eligibility for the [National] Childcare Scheme.
3. Start the development of the legislative amendment in year one of the strategy as the legislative process can take some time.
4. Review the various definitions of childminding services and eligibility criteria underpinning national policy and programmes to ensure consistency and their support for national policy goals for children and families.
5. Review how best to support in-home childcare by au pairs and nannies to ensure children’s protection, health and development, and possible parental access to subsidies.

## Regulation, Registration and Inspection

6. Develop the required amendments to the 1991 Child Care Act. The Working Group was aware that the DCYA is reviewing the Child Care Act 1991 over the next three years with a view to reform. There is a case for amending the Act separately from this review and reform process to support childminders’ migration to become regulated providers of childcare.
7. Establish an expert group on Registration, Regulation and Inspection that would develop minimum regulatory standards for childminding services for children from birth to 15 years. This expert group could start by developing the minimum regulatory standards required for initial registration, covering, but not necessarily limited, to:
  - The suitability of the childminder
    - Up-to-date Certification in First Aid for children
    - Two written references
    - Insurance for the childminding service
    - Certification in Always Children First training
    - Certification in at least the QQI level 5 minor award in childminding, or other recognised qualifications for early years on the DCYA list
    - Copy of the vetting disclosure received from the National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána in accordance with the National Vetting Bureau Children & Vulnerable Persons Act, 2012.
  - The suitability of other people in the home
    - A copy of the vetting disclosure for all members of the household aged over 18 received from the National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána in accordance with the National Vetting Bureau Children & Vulnerable Persons Act, 2012.
  - The suitability of the home; the childminder should be required to present:

- Copy of health and safety risk assessment
  - Copy of a Fire Safety Plan
8. Create a Communications Strategy, to communicate the benefits of registration, to childminders and parents.

### **Quality Standards and Supports**

9. Establish an expert group on Quality Standards, Mentoring and Network Development to recommend appropriate quality standards for childminding in line with the Síolta Framework.
10. As part of the national childminding office, create a system of staffed childminding networks, facilitated by childcare professionals with experience in childminding.
11. Once regulatory and quality standards have been agreed, establish an expert group to develop education and professional training for childminders:
- Redevelop the QQI Level 5 minor award in Childminding, alongside basic training in paediatric first aid and Always Children First.
  - Review other QQI Level 5 components with view to including mixed age childcare and business practice for childminders.
  - Consider educational development for childminders in the longer term: continuous professional development, special purpose awards and major awards at different levels.
12. Provide childminders with access to a learner fund or equivalent so they can achieve further childcare qualifications should they wish to.
13. Introduce a Grandfathering Declaration Clause for those close to retirement from childminding.

### **Funding and Financial Supports**

14. Establish a funding and financial support expert group to review the effectiveness and efficiency of the funding and financial supports to childminding services
15. All registered and regulated childminding services should be eligible to apply to deliver the ACS [National Childcare Scheme] and other government funded schemes

### **Strategy and Implementation**

16. Establish a National Childminding Strategy informed by the proposals of this Working Group to coordinate the regulatory and quality support aspects within one coherent framework. The National Childminding Strategy should be included in the National Early Years Strategy
17. Establish the following expert groups to further develop the pathway to quality supports and assurance for childminding:
- Minimum standards, registration, regulation and inspection
  - Quality standards, mentoring and network development
  - Education and professional development
  - Communication strategy
  - Funding and financial supports
  - Monitoring and review of strategy implementation.
18. Establish an appropriately resourced National Childminding Office to ensure the delivery of the National Childminding Strategy. Suggested functions of the Office would be:
- Developing, in partnership with the DCYA and relevant stakeholders, an implementation plan for the National Childminding Strategy, and annual work plans
  - Managing the regional and local support staffed networks for childminding services

- Providing strategic operational direction
  - Monitoring and adjusting the implementation of the National Childminding Strategy
  - Implementing a national childminding communications strategy.
19. Commission a specialist to produce a feasibility study on the proposed reforms for a childminding regulatory and support system.
  20. Support the development of a model for estimating and planning for the supply and demand of childminding services within the context of the wider ECEC and SAC sectors.