



scottish commission for
the regulation of care



Review of the quality of childminding 2006





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Terms we use in this report

Inspection Report

We inspect childminders at least once a year using the National Care Standards as well as regulations set out in law. After each inspection we produce a report, where we consider how the service compares against the standards and regulations. Each report highlights the childminder's strengths, where they have improved since our previous inspection and also where we believe improvements can still be made.

Announced Inspection

We plan an inspection and tell the childminder in advance when we plan to inspect them.

Unannounced Inspection

We plan an inspection of a childminder but we do not give them advance warning of the date.

Complaints

We have a procedure for dealing with any complaints made about registered services or about us. Anyone can raise a complaint with us, for example people using the service, their family and friends, carers and staff.

We investigate all complaints and can decide to:

- Uphold the complaint if we agree there is a problem to be resolved
- Partially uphold a complaint if we

agree with some elements of the complaint and find some problems, but do not find evidence for other aspects of the complaint

- Not uphold the complaint if we do not find evidence to support it

Enforcement

To protect people who use care services, the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 gives us powers to enforce the law. This means we can vary or impose new conditions of registration, which may restrict how a childminder operates. We can also serve an improvement notice on a childminder to make them improve their service within a set timescale. If they do not make these improvements we could cancel their registration.

Recommendations and Requirements

If we are concerned about some aspect of a childminding service, or think they could do more to improve their service, we may make a requirement or a recommendation.

- A **requirement** is a statement that sets out what is legally required of a childminder to comply with legislation. If we make a requirement, we check that the childminder has made the changes we have asked them to and can take legal action against them if they haven't.
- A **recommendation** is a statement that sets out actions the childminder

should take to improve the quality of service.

Care Standards questionnaires

A series of questionnaires which give parents the opportunity to tell us how satisfied they are with the childminding service they use.

Parents and carers

For brevity, we use the term 'parent' to mean both parents and carers.

National Care Standards

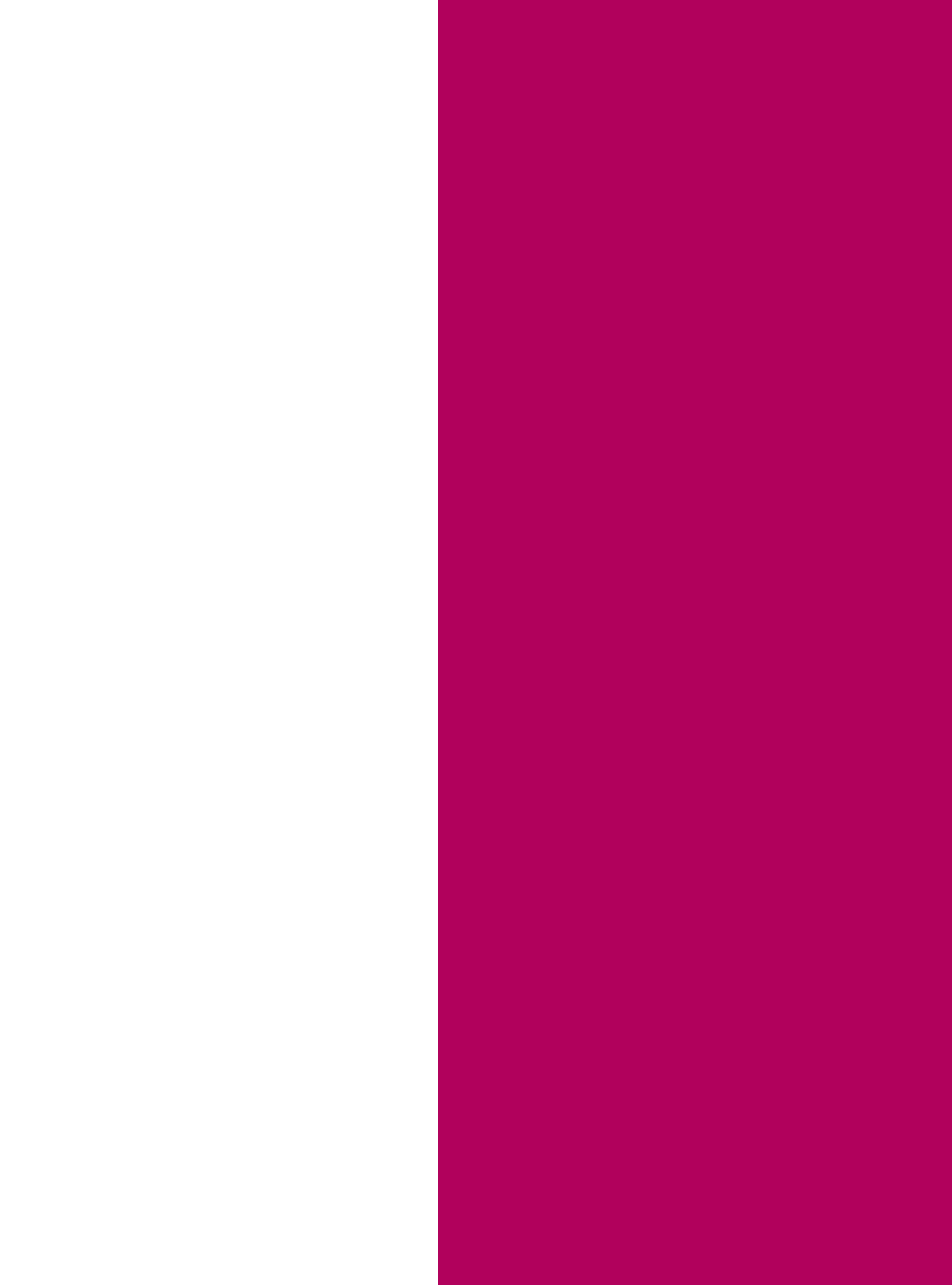
These are published by the Scottish Ministers for every type of care service and are written from a service user's perspective. They set out the standard of care that people can expect from any care services they use. When we are inspecting childminding services we take into account the National Care Standards for early education and childcare up to the age of 16. In the rest of this report we refer to these as the standards.

Copies are available, free of charge, from:

Blackwells Bookshop
53-59 South Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YS
Telephone: 0131 622 8283

PMS

The PMS, or Practice Management System, is the computer system we use to collect and store information about regulation and care services.



Foreword

This is the first time we have ever had a national picture of the quality and availability of childminding in Scotland. This unique national perspective has allowed us to collect consistent information about the quality of childminding in all parts of Scotland and I am pleased that we are now in a position to share our findings with you.

Parents have to place a great deal of trust in their childminder and I hope they will be reassured by our findings which indicate that, overall, the quality of care is good. On the whole, most parents are happy with the care their children receive from their childminder. However, we have also found that there are a small number of childminding services which give real cause for concern. We have been swift in taking action in these cases to improve the services childminders offer, or close them down.

Since we took over the responsibility for regulating childminders on 1 April 2002, we have developed a consistent approach to regulation in all parts of the country. All childminders are now working towards the same set of standards - Scotland's National Care Standards for early education and childcare up to the age of 16, which are set by Scottish Ministers.

Although we regulate childminders using the same regulations and standards as any other childcare service, it is important that we remember the unique nature of childminding. Parents have emphasised how much they value the informal and homely environment provided for the children and the close and informal relationship between childminder and parent. Childminders clearly offer a much-needed service within their community, providing affordable childcare for parents across Scotland.

There is something in this report for everyone who cares about improving the quality of childcare in Scotland. Whatever the nature of your interest, I hope you will find it useful, helpful and informative.



Ronnie Hill
Director of Children's
Services Regulation

Executive Summary

This is the third review of the quality of care services that we in the Care Commission have produced since we were set up in April 2002. It's the first report we have written about childminding services.



This review:

- Provides an overview of childminding services in Scotland
- Considers all the information we have gathered about childminding services and what it tells us
- Assesses the quality of childminding services in Scotland using this information.

Our findings

Overall the quality of most childminding services in Scotland is good, with 78% of services having no requirements¹ made during inspection.

When we asked parents for their views on childminding we found that:

- 97.4% (4015) were 'very happy' or 'happy' with the service provided by their childminder
- 1.6% (65) were 'very unhappy' with the quality of service provided.

Our research shows that childminders enjoy the flexibility of the job and the fact that they are based in their own home. However low pay, few holidays and long, intensive working hours were identified as more negative aspects of the job.

¹ We make a **requirement** when we find that a childminder is not meeting a regulation. It is a statement that sets out what is legally required of a childminder to comply with legislation.

Our recommendations

Using these findings, we make recommendations on what childminders, parents and the Care Commission can do in the future to improve childminding services.

Our main recommendations are

Childminders should:

- Communicate more effectively with parents about their children and about the service they provide, as parents will often be able to identify ways to improve how the childminder cares for their child
- Encourage feedback from parents and children and make sure they have a complaints procedure in place that parents know how to use
- Carry out regular fire drills, test their fire alarms regularly, and keep records of these tests
- Only care for the number of children they have registered with us for and be aware that we will take swift action if they exceed this number
- Improve the service they offer by developing their skills, for example through training courses
- Work with parents to understand their childrens' nutritional requirements and to offer a choice of healthy food.

Our research shows that childminders enjoy the flexibility of the job



Parents should:

- Be aware of the National Care Standards and discuss them with their childminder to help develop the service the childminder is offering
- Read inspection reports and discuss them with their childminder
- Raise comments and complaints with their childminder so they can improve their service, and use our complaints procedure if they have to.

We should:

- Continue to scrutinise childminding services in a way that gives parents confidence in them and encourages childminders to continuously improve
- Carry out more unannounced inspections and inspections at short notice
- Find more ways to make our processes easier for childminders. For example, we have already worked with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) to shorten our application forms for new childminders and now provide more advice and support during the registration process



- Find more ways to involve parents, carers and children in the way we regulate childminders and in improving childminding services
- Promote training and support for childminders in partnership with other organisations such as the Childcare Partnerships and SCMA
- Work with partners, such as the Scottish Executive and the SCMA to produce clear information about our respective roles for childminders and parents.

Section 1

Introduction

Introduction

This section covers:

- Who we are
- What this report is about
- How we researched this report
- The policy context for childminding services in Scotland

Who we are

We were set up in 2002 to help improve care services in Scotland. We register and inspect around 15,000 services that care for more than 200,000 people in all parts of Scotland. These services include childminders, nurseries, day care services, care homes and private hospitals.

What this report is about

This is the third review of the quality of care services that we have produced since we were set up in April 2002.

We are the only regulator of childminding services in Scotland. This is the first report to give a detailed analysis of the availability and quality of childminding services in Scotland.

Access to quality childminding services can have a significant impact on the everyday life of parents and is invaluable to many parents. As one parent told us: “My childminder is central in my life. I couldn’t exist without her.” (Parent)

Many parents choose to use a childminder instead of centre-based childcare such as a nursery, because they value their child being cared for within a homely, informal environment.

At the end of the financial year 2004/05, there were 5,890 childminding services registered with us. Provisional figures for March 2006 indicate that this has risen to over 6,000. Childminders are the largest single group of services we work with, accounting for about 40% of all the services we register and regulate.

How we researched this report

When we were writing this report we:

- Examined the trends in childminding services using data from different sources, including the Scottish Executive and SCMA

- Considered information we gathered during 2004/05 when we were inspecting childminding services, dealing with complaints about them and taking enforcement action against them
- Commissioned external research with a small number of parents and childminders, the results of which we have included throughout the report.

The policy context for childminding services in Scotland

Over the past ten years, significant policy developments have affected childcare in Scotland.

The Scottish Executive's strategy for childcare in Scotland, 'Meeting the childcare challenge: a childcare strategy for Scotland' (The Scottish Office, May 1998), outlined three problems in the childcare sector:

- The quality of care can vary
- The cost of care is high
- There are not enough childcare places in many areas, with poor information making it more difficult to find out about available places.

These problems are now being addressed by a range of organisations.

The Scottish Executive Education Department develops policies to make sure that the quality, cost and availability of childcare continue to improve. The document 'A partnership for a better Scotland' (Scottish Parliament, May 2003), sets out childcare commitments for the 2003-2007 parliamentary session, including:

- Providing childcare opportunities for all children
- Maintaining free nursery places for every three and four year old in Scotland
- Providing support in areas of high unemployment to help people in work, training or education.

At the Care Commission, our role in this is to improve quality by regulating childcare services, including childminding services. We use the Scottish Ministers' National Care Standards for Early Education and Childcare and the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act (2001) and its associated Regulations



to examine the quality of childcare. We do this by inspecting childminding services regularly to check their quality and investigate complaints about them. If they do not meet the standards we expect, we take action to make them change. We also work with partners and childminders to improve the quality of services available.

Childcare Partnerships have been set up in each local authority area to increase the number of childcare places and provide information about the places that are available locally. These partnerships bring together central government, local government, private and voluntary service providers, parents, the wider community and other partners with a local interest in childcare.

The Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) is a membership organisation for registered childminders and others with an interest in childminding. It provides information, training and development opportunities and has its own quality assessment award called the Scheme of Excellence which childminders can work towards.

At present there is no formal qualification required to be a childminder, although many childminders do have formal qualifications. A recent survey by the Scottish Executive showed that about a quarter of them have childcare qualifications (Scottish Executive, July 2005). Although formal childcare qualifications are optional, training and development for childminders is an important way to improve services.

The Scottish Executive began a National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce in the summer of 2004 and are due to publish their final report in 2006.



The workforce review aims to increase the status of the workforce and improve employment opportunities for all workers in the sector. It is considering:

- Qualifications and training
- Workforce planning
- Recruitment and retention
- Career pathways
- Roles and responsibilities.

As an integral part of the early years and childcare sector, childminders have been fully included in the workforce review.

Section 2

**Facts and figures
about childminding
in Scotland**

Facts and figures about childminding in Scotland

There are many reasons why the availability of childminding places varies across Scotland. In this section we describe how and where childminding services are provided. We cover:

- Trends in childminding services
- How we have been making regulation simpler for childminders
- What demand there is for childminding
- The childminding services available in each local authority area
Childminding services available in urban and rural areas.

Trends in childminding services

On 31 March 2005, there were 5,890 childminders registered with us.



The table below shows that the number of registered childminders has decreased each year since we began to regulate this sector in April 2002. This decrease in numbers now appears to be slowing down, from an 11% drop between 2002 and 2003 to a 4% drop between 2004 and 2005.

One of the reasons for this decrease is the way we now record and register childminders. For the first time, information about childminders operating in Scotland is now held by one public organisation. This has allowed us to identify duplicate records of childminders so that we count each childminder once. Some of the reduction in numbers has happened because we have taken away these duplicate records.

We also believe that some childminders cancelled their registration after we were introduced as they had not been active for some time and did not plan to look after children in future.

From the information we have collected so far during 2005/06 it appears the number of childminders is increasing this year, with a provisional figure of over 6000 registered childminders at March 2006.

The table below also shows that there is a regular turnover of childminders each year, with considerable new registrations each year (increasing from 11% at March 2003 to 15% at March 2005). This increase indicates that childminding remains an attractive employment option.

	Number of childminders	% of services that were new registrations	% of services that cancelled
at 31 March 2002 (r)	7636		
cancellations	1547		20%
new registrations	732	11%	
at 31 March 2003 (r)	6821		
% change in services	-11%		
cancellations	1472		22%
new registrations	773	13%	
at 31 March 2004	6122		
% change in services	-10%		
cancellations	1117		18%
new registrations	885	15%	
at 31 March 2005	5890		
% change in services	-4%		

Source: PMS 21/09/05

(r) These figures have been revised since previous publications and are based on information available at September 2005.



Figures released by the Scottish Executive based on a survey of 600 childminders showed that 18% of childminders had left or were intending to leave childminding within a year. Of these:

- 31% were leaving because of family reasons
- 12% were pursuing another childcare job.

(Pre-school and childcare statistics 2005, Scottish Executive 2005).

The figure of 18% intending to cancel is reinforced by the data in the above table, which shows that the percentage of childminders who cancelled their registrations ranged between 22% at 31 March 2003 and 18% at 31 March 2004 cancelling during 2004/05.

We commissioned external researchers to carry out in-depth interviews with childminders. As part of this research, we asked them about the positive and negative aspects of being a childminder.

Our research shows that childminders enjoyed the flexibility of the job, and the fact that it was based in their own home. However, low pay, few holidays and long, intensive working hours were given as negative aspects of the job.

"It's not great pay and that's one thing that I find is a major factor for me. It's hard work because it's non-stop and it's not a great amount of money."
(Childminder)



"The pay is not very good and it really needs to be something you do for a greater reason." (Childminder)

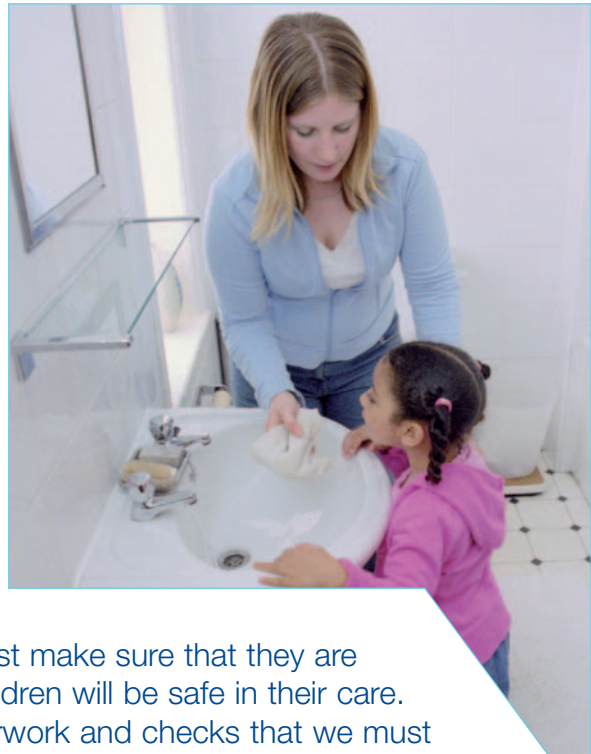
Childminders also told us that the registration process had been long and the paperwork quite difficult:

"The worst thing was the wait. I was told to expect six months which I thought was bad enough, but it took much longer....it's quite frustrating because once you've made the decision, you just want to get going and get on with it." (Childminder)

"I know I struggled with the all the paperwork I had to fill out and really worried about what to write down. I sat there for hours and hours trying to work out what I should write." (Childminder)

"All the paper work and information I had to divulge was so daunting. I nearly didn't bother and I know people who have been put off. You see the pack they send out and think, no way!" (Childminder)

How we have been making regulation simpler for childminders



When we register a new childminder, we must make sure that they are going to provide a good service and that children will be safe in their care. Inevitably, this means that there will be paperwork and checks that we must carry out. However we know that childminders are very small businesses and that people who want to be childminders do so because they enjoy looking after children.

We do not want to overburden childminders with unnecessary paperwork. So we have worked with other partners, particularly the SCMA, to make our processes more straightforward for childminders. The registration process is one example of this. When we are registering childminders we:

- Visit their premises
- Discuss the standards with them to make sure they understand the quality service that will be expected of them
- Carry out checks to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

It is important that our process highlights the factors that will prevent someone from becoming a childminder at the earliest possible stage so that people who are thinking of becoming a childminder know the standards we will expect of them. It is also important that we are rigorous in our checks on potential childminders to make sure they are fit to work with children. However we must strike the right balance between ensuring the safety of children and the suitability of childminders with the need to make our processes simple and keep paperwork to a minimum.

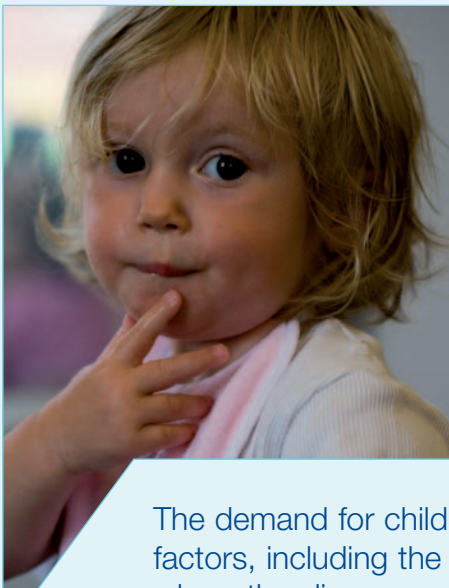
We also need to clarify the roles of some of the organisations involved in regulating, supporting and training childminders:

"I know it took me a while to get to grips with who are the Care Commission in relation to childminders and who are the SCMA and which one is there for support, which one is there to govern it...it took me a while and I just found it all very confusing." (Childminder, Edinburgh)

"I think it would have been easier to have been able to obtain a leaflet or something right at the beginning that would make it clear who was who." (Childminder, Edinburgh)

This year we started registering 845 new services. Of these, 98 (12%) withdrew before we completed the registration.

It is not always possible for us to record the reasons a childminder decides not to register. However the cases we did record show the most frequent reason an application could not proceed was because they did not respond to our letters, so we could not process their application. Other reasons we were given included applicants finding other jobs, concerns we had over the suitability of an applicant to be a childminder and a variety of personal reasons such as pregnancy and moving home.



In addition, seven applicants (0.8% of the total applicants) were refused registration because we assessed that they were medically unfit to be a childminder or because of criminal convictions, either of the applicant or someone else living in the home.

We registered the remaining 740 applications, although two of these withdrew before we had finished their registration.

What is the demand for childminding?

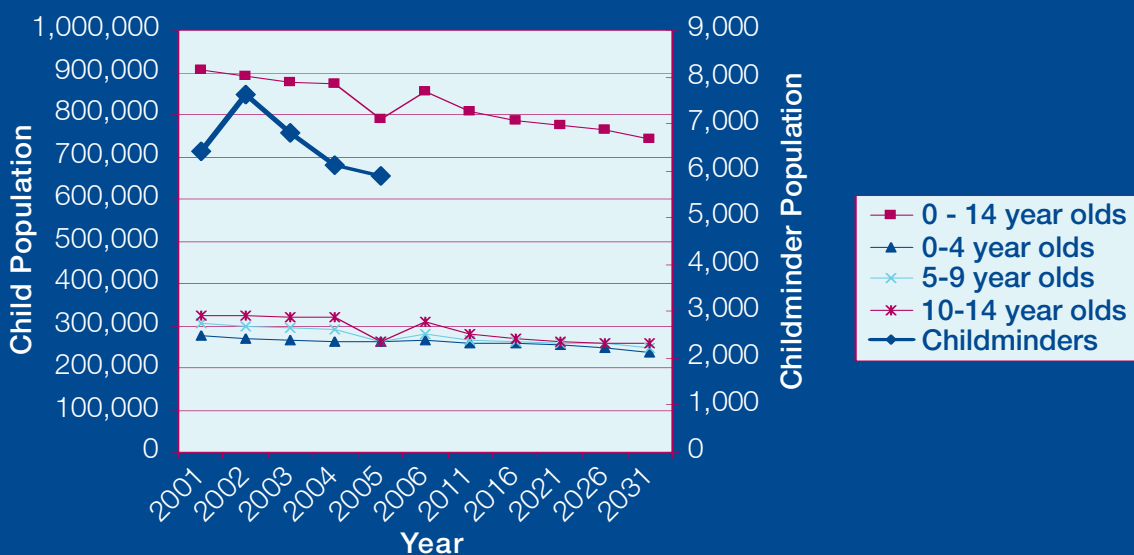
The demand for childminding is likely to be influenced by a number of factors, including the age and number of children in the population and where they live.

Surveys by the Scottish Executive have shown that the majority of children who use childminders are aged under five, although childminders are used by children up to the age of 16. (Scottish Executive, July 2005)

The chart below shows the projected population of children in Scotland, using 30 June 2004 as the base. The population is projected to fall steadily over the next 20 years.

The chart also shows the decline in the number of childminders since 2002, although this decline has slowed down by 2005.

If the current levels of childminding were thought to be satisfactory then the number of childminders would need to remain around their current levels, with a possible slight decline over the next 20 years, to maintain the right level of childminders for the population.



Source: GRO (Scotland) 2004-based population projections; GRO(S) population estimates 2001-2004; Source: PMS 21/09/05

What childminding services are available in each local authority area?

The number of childminders varies across the country. This is illustrated by looking at the number of childminders in each local authority area.

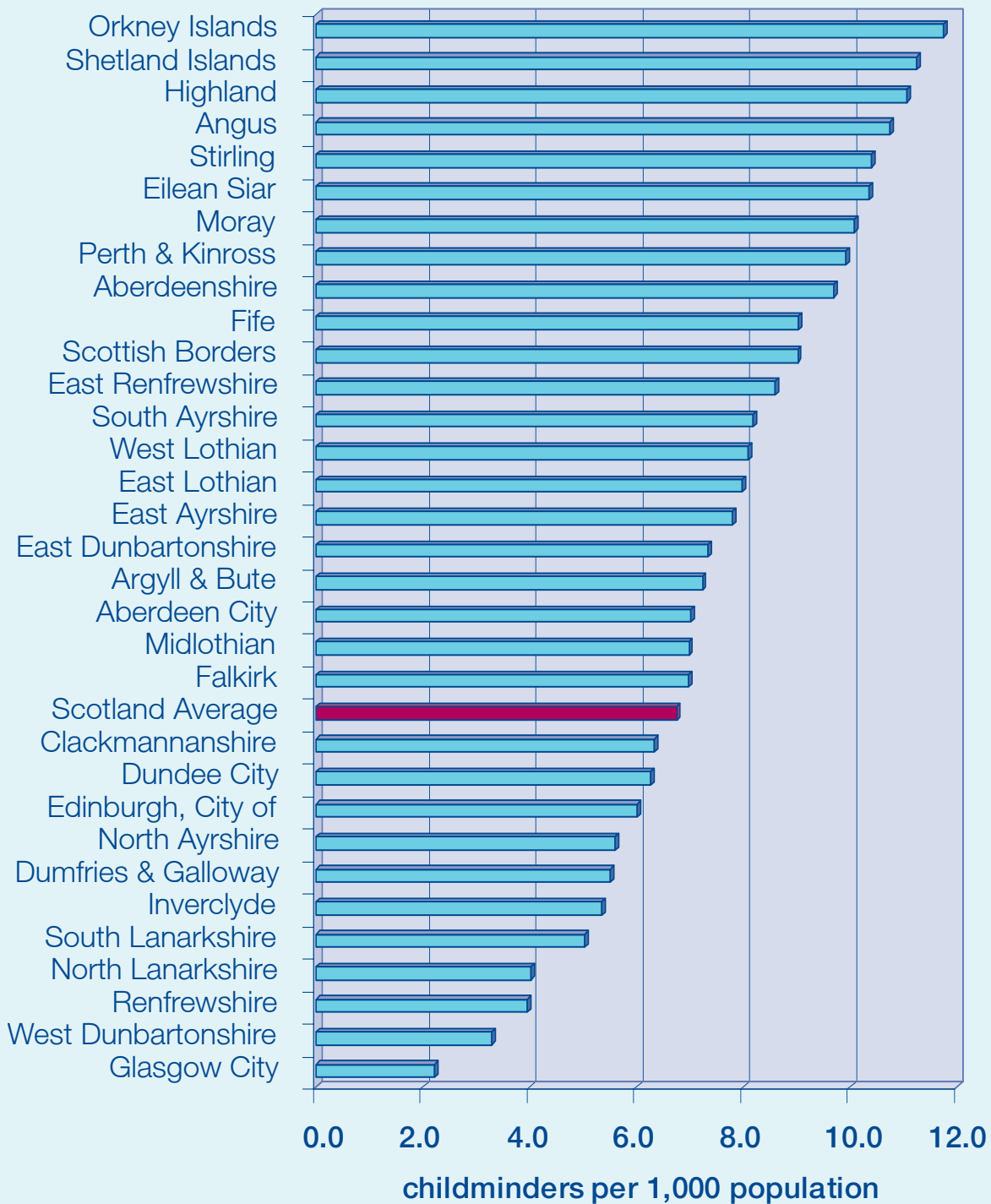
The table and chart below illustrate the distribution of childminders across local authority areas. It shows that some areas such as Fife, Aberdeenshire and Highland have a relatively high number of childminders compared to areas such as Orkney, Shetland and West Dunbartonshire.

The final column describes the number of childminders available per 1,000 children and young people aged 0-14 in each area. On average there are 6.8 childminders for every 1,000 children and young people aged 0-14 years across Scotland. Orkney, Shetland and the Highlands all have a high proportion of childminders relative to their population, while areas such as Glasgow City, West Dunbartonshire and Renfrewshire all have very low levels of childminders relative to their population of 0-14s.

Childminders by local authority area at 31 March 2005

Local Authority	Number of childminders	% in each area	childminders per 1,000 population aged 0-14
Aberdeen City	212	3.6%	7.0
Aberdeenshire	421	7.1%	9.7
Angus	202	3.4%	10.7
Argyll & Bute	110	1.9%	7.2
Clackmannanshire	56	1.0%	6.3
Dumfries & Galloway	135	2.3%	5.5
Dundee City	141	2.4%	6.3
East Ayrshire	165	2.8%	7.8
East Dunbartonshire	141	2.4%	7.3
East Lothian	138	2.3%	8.0
East Renfrewshire	149	2.5%	8.6
Edinburgh, City of	397	6.7%	6.0
Eilean Siar	46	0.8%	10.4
Falkirk	184	3.1%	7.0
Fife	559	9.5%	9.0
Glasgow City	205	3.5%	2.2
Highland	409	6.9%	11.1
Inverclyde	76	1.3%	5.4
Midlothian	104	1.8%	7.0
Moray	158	2.7%	10.1
North Ayrshire	136	2.3%	5.6
North Lanarkshire	241	4.1%	4.0
Orkney Islands	40	0.7%	11.8
Perth & Kinross	233	4.0%	9.9
Renfrewshire	117	2.0%	3.9
Scottish Borders	171	2.9%	9.0
Shetland Islands	48	0.8%	11.3
South Ayrshire	147	2.5%	8.2
South Lanarkshire	273	4.6%	5.0
Stirling	162	2.8%	10.4
West Dunbartonshire	53	0.9%	3.3
West Lothian	261	4.4%	8.1
Grand Total	5890	100.0%	6.8

Source: PMS 21/0905; GRO(S) 2004 population estimates



What childminding services are available in urban and rural areas?

It is important that parents who live in both urban and rural areas have access to good quality childcare close to their homes.

To find out about what access they have, we used the Scottish Executive's urban/rural classifications. These classifications set out eight different types of area in Scotland and describe the characteristics of different places that people live in, for example a city with a population of over 125,000 people or a small town within a 30-minute drive to the nearest large town.



We have used these classifications in the table below to show the proportion of childminders working in each of these types of areas and to compare this proportion with the percentage of people who live there.

The percentage of childminders in urban areas tends to be lower than the percentage of the population who live there. In the more remote and rural areas, there tends to be a higher percentage of childminders compared to the population living there. This is particularly the case in the accessible small town and rural areas (within a 30-minute drive of a larger settlement). The

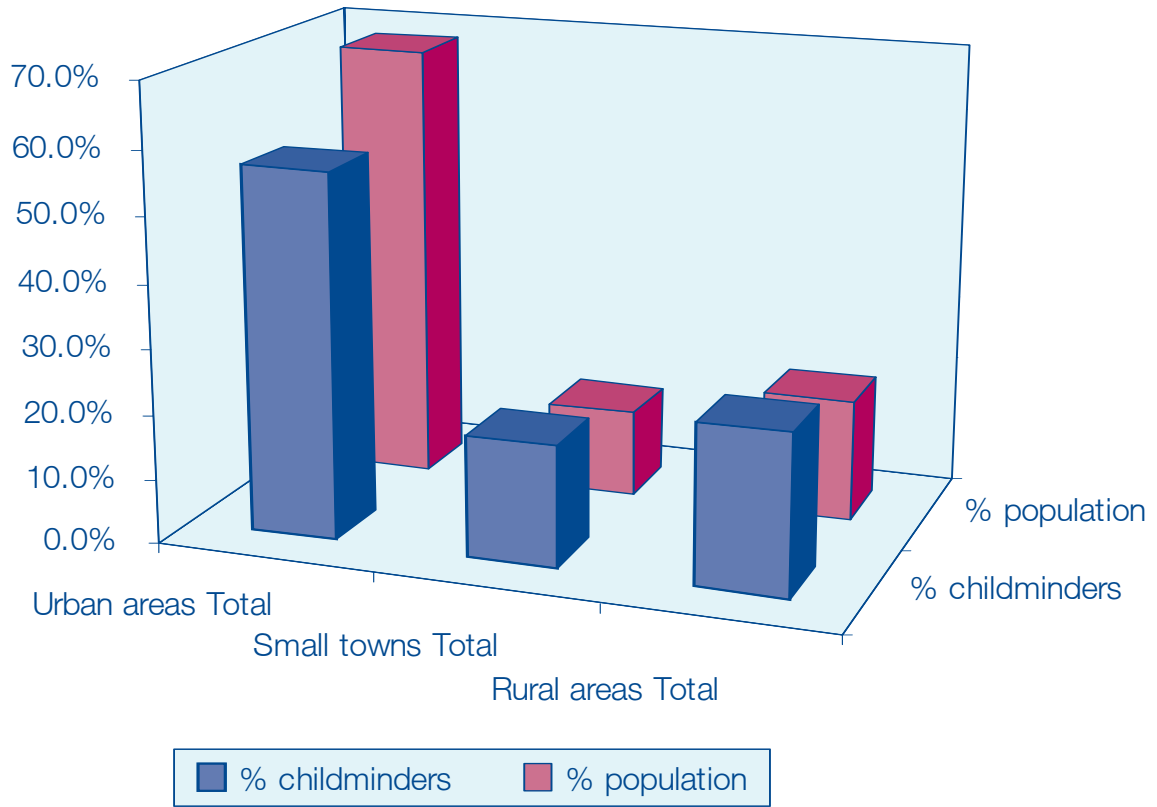
very remote small town and rural areas also have a higher percentage of childminders compared to their population, although this is less marked.

These overall figures show that there is a higher proportion of childminders in the more remote areas than there are in the urban areas.

% of childminders and % of total population by urban/rural classification

Urban/Rural indicator	number of childminders at 31 Mar 05		% population in each classification
		%	
Large Urban Areas - Settlements of over 125,000 people.	1427	24.2%	39%
Other Urban Areas - Settlements of 10,000 to 125,000 people.	1899	32.2%	29%
Urban areas Total	3326	56.5%	68%
Accessible Small Towns - Settlements of between 3,000 and 10,000 people and within 30 minutes' drive of a settlement of 10,000 or more.	875	14.9%	10%
Remote Small Towns - Settlements of between 3,000 and 10,000 people and with a drive time of between 30 and 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more.	130	2.2%	2%
Very Remote Small Towns - Settlements of between 3,000 and 10,000 people and with a drive time of over 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more.	100	1.7%	1%
Small towns Total	1105	18.8%	13%
Accessible Rural - Settlements of less than 3,000 people and within 30 minutes' drive of a settlement of 10,000 or more.	1079	18.3%	13%
Remote Rural - Settlements of less than 3,000 people and with a drive time of between 30 and 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more.	161	2.7%	3%
Very Remote Rural - Settlements of less than 3,000 people and with a drive time of over 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more.	219	3.7%	3%
Rural areas total	1459	24.8%	19%
Total	5890	100.0%	100%

Source: PMS 21 Sept 2005; GRO(S) 2004 population estimates



Section 3

**How we collect
information about
childminding
services**

How we collect information about childminding services

We gather a wide range of information when we are regulating childminding services. This section explains:

- How we inspect childminding services
- What action we can take to improve the quality of childminding services
- How we collect parents' views about childminders during an inspection
- How we investigate complaints about childminders
- How we commissioned independent research to find out parents' and childminders' views.

How we inspect childminding services

We inspected 4,949 childminding services during 2004/05. This is not the total number of childminding services in Scotland because we may not have inspected all of them. For example if a service was newly registered, in the process of cancelling or not active during this period then we would not necessarily have inspected it during the year.

During an inspection, our Care Commission Officers (CCOs) consider:

- The National Care Standards for early education and childcare up to the age of 16
- The requirements set out in the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 and its associated Regulations.

What action we can take to improve the quality of childminding services

If a childminder is not meeting these regulations or standards, we can take different levels of action. We can make a recommendation, a requirement or take enforcement action.

Recommendation

We can make a recommendation in our inspection report if a childminder is not meeting a standard.

We also use recommendations to encourage childminders to keep improving their service. During the year, we made at least one recommendation in our reports on 2,839 (57.4%) of the childminders we inspected. We examined the recommendations made in a sample of 500 inspection reports to find out what types of recommendations were most common. We have used these to help us analyse the quality of childminding in section four.

Requirement

We can make a requirement in our inspection report for a childminder to change the way they deliver part of their service.

Requirements reflect real concerns we have about the care and wellbeing of children. We make a requirement if a childminder is not meeting a regulation, which means they are not meeting their legal obligations. If the childminder does not take steps to meet the requirement, we may take legal action to make sure they do.

During 2004/05 we made 2,223 requirements against the 4,949 childminding services we inspected. Of these:

- 21.5% (1,065) had at least one requirement made
- Some services had more than one requirement made
- One service had 12 requirements made



Enforcement action

We can take enforcement action if a childminder does not show us they are improving in line with requirements we have made, or if we have serious concerns about the service they provide.

This means we take legal action to make sure they make the changes we ask for and, if necessary, we can close them down. This year we issued 188 legal notices to childminders. Of these:

- 145 (77%) were to childminders who had moved away without telling us or had not paid cancellation fees they owed us

- 43 (23%) were issued to 30 different childminders who were not delivering a quality service (0.5% of childminding services or five enforcements for every 1,000 registered services). We closed down four of these services because of the poor quality of care which was being provided. This represents a very small proportion of all of the childminders registered with us (less than 0.1% or less than one service cancelled for every 1,000 services registered with us).

How we collect parents' views about childminders during an inspection

When we are inspecting a childminding service, we ask parents to complete a questionnaire to tell us how happy they are with the service.

We analysed 4,123 questionnaires which were completed during 2004/05, covering 1,932 childminders (32.8% of childminding services). We found that:

- 97.4% (4015) were either 'very happy' or 'happy' with the service provided by their childminder
- 1.6% (65) were 'very unhappy' with the quality of service provided.

When we carry out an inspection we always write an inspection report and give a copy of this to the childminder. The inspection report contains details of any requirements, recommendations or enforcement action we plan to take.

We believe complaints are an opportunity for childminders to improve their service

It also contains information about the many positive aspects of childminders that we observe during the visit. Inspection reports are available on our website or by contacting our local offices.

How we investigate complaints about childminders

We also investigate complaints made about childminders. During 2004/05 we received 115 complaints against childminders.

We completed investigations into 99 complaints during the year and upheld or partially upheld 52 (52.5%) of them. This means that we had a complaint about 2% of all childminders we register (as at March 2005) and upheld a complaint against 0.9% of registered childminders.

We believe complaints are an opportunity for childminders to improve their service and most childminders take action to improve their service following a complaint. However some complaints do lead to further action, such as enforcement. This year we identified four cases where the complaints were so serious that they led to immediate enforcement action. This meant that we placed one of the following:

- A condition on a childminder's registration, for example to reduce the number of children they could look after
- An improvement notice where we took legal action to get the childminder to improve their service, for example to make sure their garden was safe for children to play in.

How we commissioned independent research to find out parents and childminders views

This year we commissioned some independent research by a company called TNS System Three. They held three focus groups with parents to ask them about their childminder and the service they receive. They also carried out and carried out six, in-depth interviews with childminders to find out about their thoughts and feelings about providing a childminding service.

We have used the results of this research (TNS System Three, March 2006) throughout the report. You can find a full copy of this research on our website.

Section 4

**Quality and good
practice in
childminding**

Quality and good practice in childminding

This section explores the quality of childminding in more detail, using information we have collected from the sources we described in section three:

- Our inspections, complaints investigations and enforcements
- Parent questionnaires and focus groups
- Interviews with a small number of childminders.

We have considered the issue of quality under the three main sections of the National Care Standards for early education and childcare up to the age of 16:

- Being welcomed and cared for
- Confidence in the service
- Confidence in management.



Being welcomed and cared for

What do we expect of a childminder?

Children and young people must feel welcomed and valued when they are being cared for by a childminder. They should also be cared for in a safe and healthy environment.

Three National Care Standards set out what a childminder is expected to do in this area:

- Each child or young person will be welcomed and will be valued as an individual (standard 1)
- The needs of each child or young person are met by the service in a safe environment, in line with all relevant legislation (standard 2)
- Health and wellbeing (standard 3).

Are childminders meeting these expectations?

Childminders must provide a safe and secure environment for the children in their care, and must be able to demonstrate that they have procedures in place to make the environment safe.

This year we made requirements against 116 services (2.3% of those services inspected) about the standard of their premises. This included requirements about safety, for example asking childminders to remove or make safe dangerous items from their homes or gardens or making sure their premises and equipment for the children were clean.

Feedback from our parent questionnaires showed that most parents are very happy that their children were being cared for in a hygienic, pleasant and smoke-free environment. Only 0.4% (19) gave a negative response for this question.

Having regular fire drills and testing fire alarms could save lives if there is a fire. It is also important that parents know what fire safety precautions are in place and that childminders show that they are vigilant about fire safety. During our inspections this year, we found 313 (6.3%) services were not keeping records of fire drills and fire alarm tests and we made requirements against these services. In addition, a common recommendation was that childminders should put fire safety procedures in place.

Another key area of safety is making sure there are records of any medicines that the childminder must give to children. This is particularly important so that parents know what medicines the childminder has given to their child and can be reassured that their child receives the correct dose at the right time. We found that 140 (2.8%) services were not keeping adequate records about the medicines that had been administered and we made a requirement against the childminder about this. We also made recommendations about how medicines were stored and administered, and this was a common recommendation identified in our sample.

Children have a right to be protected, and childminders are expected to have a child protection policy in place to demonstrate how they would deal with a child protection issue. When we asked parents about this, 82.7% of parents who responded to our questionnaires were aware of their childminder's child protection policies and 17.3% were not.

Good practice case 1

Childminder A keeps her policies and procedures on issues including fire safety, child protection and administration of medicines in a clearly marked folder on a table in her hallway in full view of parents.

As she is aware that parents will not always have time to read this folder, and to avoid giving parents a full copy of the many policies to read, she has prepared a leaflet that gives a list of all of the policies and procedures that are in place.

She also highlights some of the main issues to parents, for example that they must make sure that any medicines are clearly marked with their child's name and the dosage required, and that she will keep a record of any medicine she gives to a child which the parent can check.

Many factors influence the health and wellbeing of children. This year we made requirements directly linked to the health and welfare of children and young people in 400 (8%) of the services we inspected. This included, for example, making sure that kitchen knives were kept out of reach, or that main doors could not be opened by the children.

We also upheld 12% of complaints against childminders on health and welfare issues, with 10% of these about health and safety issues specifically.

Complaint case 1

We received a complaint that a childminder was leaving two children she cared for unattended in a car while she was picking up a third from nursery.

Although we felt that the childminder had considered her actions very carefully and had the consent of the parents for this, we judged that the safety of the children was being compromised and upheld the complaint.

What should others learn from this complaint?

The main lesson of this complaint was safety. The childminder concerned clearly appreciated her responsibilities to the children she cared for. However leaving two very young children unattended in a parked car on a busy main street - even for a relatively short period of time – was not safe.

We issued a requirement to the childminder to make sure that, for the children's health and safety, they were supervised at all times.

Nutrition is a good example of a health issue. Childminders should work with parents to try to encourage children to eat healthily.

Responses to our questionnaires showed that 2.7% (110) of parents said they did not know how happy they were with the range and choice of food provided, indicating that perhaps they were unaware of the types of food available to their children during sessions with the childminder.

In addition, 3.8% (155) did not know if there was a range of healthy snacks available to their child when they were with their childminder.



Good practice case 2

Several information packs are available to childminders and parents to help them encourage children to eat healthily:

Nutritional guidance for early years (Scottish Executive, 2005) provides information on healthy eating for young children aged one to five years by giving practical advice on food choices and menu planning.

Adventures in Foodland (NHS Health Scotland, 2005) complements the **Nutritional guidance for early years** and is a comprehensive resource designed to provide background information on nutrition, dental health and physical activity, as well as ideas on how to make food fun.



When they are developing a relationship with children and parents, childminders should give them information about the service and what they can expect from the start. This year, 2.8% of services (140 services) had a requirement made against them about the information they provided about their service.

Keeping parents informed and seeking their permission if necessary, for example to go on trips or get their children's picture taken, were common recommendations we made in inspection reports.

Our inspection reports are one specific example of information that a childminder should share with parents. Our focus groups indicated that many parents had never seen an inspection report before. When parents were shown a sample of an inspection report during the focus groups, they were surprised by the comprehensiveness of information provided and felt the report was written with them in mind and their child's welfare at heart.

Complaint case 2

We received a complaint with four main parts:

- A parent had signed a contract at the first meeting with the childminder, but was not given a copy
- The childminder did not tell the parent when they planned to take annual leave
- The stairs to the first floor of the childminder's house were accessible to the children, but did not have stair gates
- Car seats used by the childminder were very old and the parent was concerned that they may not fit the childminder's new car.

We investigated the four parts of this complaint and upheld three of them. We did not uphold the second part about annual leave as we did not find any evidence to support this allegation.

What should others learn from this complaint?

The lessons learned from this complaint are about communication and safety.

Communication

Every parent should receive a copy of their contract when their child starts with a childminder.

It is good practice for a childminder to give parents as much notice as they can that they are not going to be available, for example if they are going on holiday.

Safety

The childminder failed to consider the children's safety when she took away the stair gates. This decision could have had serious consequences for the children. Childminders should always make sure their homes are safe for the children they care for.

Many childminders transport children by car and should check that the equipment they use inside the car is safe. If any piece of equipment, like a child seat, is faulty then they are putting the children at risk.

Childminders should also recognise the individual needs of a child. Common recommendations made in inspection reports included developing equal opportunities policies and procedures and multi-cultural resources, for example having a range of dressing up clothes from different countries and cultures.

Our research shows that 11.3% (446) said their childminder usually takes into account their views and wishes on their child's development needs, interests and personality, indicating that this does not always occur. A very positive 99% said they were either very happy or happy that the childminder respected and valued their personal beliefs when caring for their child.

Good practice case 3

Childminder B knows that new environments can be frightening for young children who will often be leaving their parents for the first time. She always arranges an initial meeting with parents to fully discuss the needs of their child and how she can meet these. Children are then introduced into her home in a caring and thoughtful manner.

During the focus groups, parents also indicated that, when interviewing prospective childminders, they based their decision on whether or not they had an immediate rapport with the childminder and on how well the childminder interacted with any other children present.

"It was as simple as who she was. As simple as your kind of person and that's what clinched it for me." (Parent)

"As soon as she opened the door, I just knew...all the other kids were playing nicely together and I just went with my gut instinct more than anything." (Parent)



"I think for me it was the childminder's personality. She is very quiet and I could tell from the children she picked up she was very attentive to them and like a mother would be to her own children." (Parent)

"I think for me I decided when I went to visit it was very much, come and see me, spend some time, have a coffee and just got a feel...she was good with the wee one and the wee one settled with her really quickly." (Parent)

Confidence in the service

What do we expect of a childminder?

Children and parents need to have confidence in their childminder. Childminders build that confidence by developing good relationships with children and parents, and demonstrating that they are supporting and caring for the children and their individual needs.

The National Care Standards set out eight standards for childminders to work towards:

- Each child or young person will be supported by staff who interact effectively and enthusiastically with him or her (standard 4)
- Each child or young person can experience and choose from a balanced range of activities (standard 5)
- Each child or young person receives support from staff who respond to his or her individual needs (standard 6)

- In using the service, children, young people, parents and carers experience an environment of mutual respect, trust and open communication (standard 7)
- You will be treated fairly and equally (standard 8)
- You can be confident that the service contributes to the community and looks for opportunities to be involved in the community (standard 9)
- You can be confident that the service keeps up links and works effectively with partner organisations (standard 10)
- Each child or young person has access to a sufficient and suitable range of resources (standard 11).

Are childminders meeting these expectations?

Confidence in childminders is based on good communication, and childminders should encourage parents to talk to them about any concerns they may have so that they can be dealt with as quickly as possible. Childminders should also make sure that parents know how to raise a complaint if they need to and be confident that the childminder will deal with it properly.

In 5.7% (284) of services inspected we found that childminders did not have complaints procedures and made requirements that they put these in place to show that complaints would be dealt with appropriately.

In our parents' questionnaire we found that 29.8% (1230) of parents said that they did not know if their childminder had a complaints procedure.

Of course, complaints can often be avoided where there is open and honest communication between a childminder and parents and the childminder encourages feedback from the parents and children.

Good practice case 4

Mr and Mrs C, who jointly run their childminding service, have a complaints procedure and provide information about it to all new parents. They have also considered how they can evaluate their service themselves to make sure that parents and children remain happy with it and have introduced regular feedback forms for parents and children to fill out. This gives them early warning of concerns before they become significant problems, as well as suggestions about how they can keep improving their service.

We frequently made recommendations to encourage childminders to evaluate and improve their service, for example using feedback from parents. Parents also indicated that they would like to be involved in evaluating childminding services so that they could help other parents identify good services.

"I think that if there was more of a forum where you could talk about childminding or post opinions – 'I used this childminder, she was really good' – and you could use other mums' experiences to help you choose." (Parent)

Childminders should create an environment of mutual trust and respect with parents and children. The responses to our questionnaires show that most childminders do this successfully.

Other important findings from our parents questionnaire and focus groups

Some childminders are not meeting parents' expectations: 11.9% (492) of parents said their childminder did not always speak to them in private about their child, which indicates that this is not always common practice.

Parents need to feel confident that the childminder is supporting and interacting positively with their child. However only 5.3% (217) said that the childminder usually interacted well with their child, indicating that this does not always occur. Parents who participated in the focus groups indicated that they were generally comfortable with the level of knowledge they had about how their child was doing, and felt they would know from their child's behaviour if anything was wrong.

"I would just know. I trust my maternal instinct and I think my child would come to me if there was a problem. We talk about how their day has gone and I would just know." (Parent)

However parents of younger children did express some concerns:

"It's a bit harder to gauge if they're unhappy because I know in the early days you always wondered 'is he OK'? Is he being treated right? Is he being ignored? Do the other kids get favoured? It is very hard and I still get those feeling at times. It's always at the back of my mind." (Parent)

"Sometimes I don't feel I get to know very much. He's only 21 months so I don't really get told much unless I was to ask and when I am dropping him off and picking him up I don't have a lot of time to stand and chat, so I don't get to know very much." (Parent)

Information about their child's routine is important to parents and helps them to feel confident in the quality of the service their child receives. Although the majority (62%) of childminders always keep parents informed, 30% of parents said this did not happen regularly. Both childminders and parents should find time to discuss the children. As one parent said during a focus group:

"I would like feedback on his development. Not in a formal way, but that is the thing, you don't have a lot of time but it would be quite nice if we could find a wee bit more time to find out about his progress." (Parent)

Some other parents involved in the focus groups favoured a more formal way of getting feedback, with written agreements that structured feedback would be provided regularly.

Childminders should offer children a range of appropriate activities and equipment to encourage their development. They should provide these in their homes and through community facilities such as parks and libraries. Our findings show that only 24.8% of parents felt their child usually found the activities stimulating and challenging.

Good practice box case 5

Childminder D has a daily diary for each of the three children she minds. She makes short notes each day about important events such as what the child ate for lunch, how long they slept for and any activities they took part in. She also makes notes of their mood, for example if anything had upset them or if they had particularly enjoyed an activity. These diaries are always available for parents to read.

Confidence in management

What do we expect of a childminder?

Although childminders tend to be very small businesses, it is still very important that they manage their service well to give parents confidence that their children will be well cared for.

Good management is an essential part of creating a quality service for children and this is reflected in the final three standards from the National Care Standards for early education and childcare:



- Each child or young person receives support and care from staff who are competent and confident and who have gone through a careful selection procedure (standard 12)
- You can be confident that the service will evaluate what it does and make improvements (standard 13)
- You can be confident that you are using a service that is well managed (standard 14).

Are childminders meeting these expectations?

When a childminder registers with us, we tell them the maximum number of children that they can care for. Although most childminders work within these limits, some take on extra children.

During 2004/05, 11% of the complaints we upheld were against childminders who were looking after too many children.

Complaint case 3

We received a complaint that a childminder was:

- regularly minding more children than she had registered places
- putting the children's safety at risk by walking several dogs on a lead while out for roadside walks.

When we investigated, we found evidence to support both allegations and upheld the complaint. We then took enforcement action against the childminder and issued an improvement notice.

What should others learn from this complaint?

- Childminders should never deliberately exceed the number of registered places they have agreed with us
- Childminders must put the safety of the children they care for first at all times.

Parents must have confidence that their children are being cared for by people who are suitable to work with children.

In the case of childminders, this also includes other adults who live in the house, or are present when the children are being cared for. In a few cases, we were concerned about the suitability of people involved in childminding. We made a requirement about this against 36 services (0.7% of inspected services).

Good record-keeping is an essential part of being a childminder. Childminders must make sure that important records, especially on safety issues, are in place and up-to-date. We found that this was not the case in 12.4% of inspected services (615).

Complaints are a good way for childminders to improve their service, so it is important that they have a complaints procedure in place. We found:

- 5.7% of childminders we inspected (284) either did not have a complaints procedure, or did not have an adequate one, and we made a requirement about this
- 29.8% (1230) of parents who responded to our questionnaire did not know if their childminder had a complaints procedure.

When parents were asked about complaints during the focus groups, they did not have a good knowledge of how they would go about making a complaint. They also did not realise that they could make a complaint about a childminder to us. The researchers noted that parents did not seem to have been given information about what they should do if anything went wrong.

There were also some concerns about the repercussions of making a complaint to us.

"I wouldn't feel confident contacting them for a minor (issue). They would probably send someone in. It would just be taken too seriously." (Parent)

"I think I would like to try and deal with it on a normal level." (Parent)

"Maybe in Edinburgh or Glasgow it would be totally anonymous, but in an area like this everybody knows everybody and you just wouldn't go and report your childminder for forcing chicken nuggets down your child's throat." (Parent, rural area)

Childminders should always be looking for ways to improve their service; asking for, and listening to, feedback from parents, children and from us during inspections or when investigating complaints; and then making changes to improve the service wherever they can.

Good practice case 6

To us, successful regulation means services continuously trying to improve. In one particular childminder's case, first inspected by us in 2003, we made two recommendations and three requirements.

The following year the childminder had improved her service and we made three recommendations and no requirements.

At the next inspection the childminder had made all the improvements we had asked for and we made no further requirements or recommendations.

Communication between childminder, parents and children is a key theme of the document "Birth to Three: supporting our youngest children" (Scottish Executive and Learning Teaching Scotland, 2005). This document is aimed at childminders and others who care for young children. It emphasises the benefits of good, supportive relationships between childminder, families and children. Although parents valued the close relationship with their childminder, our focus groups' research illustrated some of the problems that can be caused when there is an informal relationship between parent and childminder. This can sometimes prevent open and honest communication for fear of affecting the relationship with the childminder.

"Yes, that's where I find it difficult with a childminder than a nursery, because I felt more confident going and speaking to the manager of a nursery if something wasn't quite right, than I do with my childminder." (Parent)

"I think I would find it quite difficult to broach something with my childminder. It would take me a couple of days to build up the confidence to say something. I wouldn't want her to take it the wrong way and fall out over something that we didn't need to fall out over." (Parent)

"I would need a lot of courage to mention little things (like too much TV)." (Parent)

Good practice case 7

Childminders can learn a great deal from working with each other. For example, one group of childminders formed a support network in 2002 after the National Care Standards were introduced and we were set up. Their initial focus was on understanding the National Care Standards, which were new at the time. The group has continued to evolve into a forum to discuss any topical issues and to share and promote good practice.

During the interviews some childminders indicated that, especially in rural areas, access to support groups with other childminders and to activities for the children could be limited:

"I did feel quite isolated when I first started the job. I feel that support groups for childminders are lacking in this area, they need to have more provision." (Childminder, rural area)

"It would be nice if there were more groups in this area that we could go to as opposed to having to go down (to the village) to do any activities." (Childminder, rural area)

However, some childminders felt that access to resources like these was crucial:

"I go for my sanity! It's also great to hear what else is happening and the kids get to mix and do activities and so on. (the baby's) mum is very keen on that too." (Childminder)

Although no formal qualifications are currently required to set up a childminding service, we expect childminders to make sure they are equipped for the job. One of the most frequent recommendations that we made was to ask childminders to ensure they had the right training and qualifications, for example in child protection and first aid.

We encourage childminders to train before they register if they have no childcare experience and to continue to develop themselves as childcare professionals.

Good practice case 8

In March 2005 around 4,700 childminders were members of the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) the membership organisation for registered childminders. As well as offering information packs and pre-registration training for potential childminders, it provides registered childminders with information and advice about childcare. It also runs the Scheme of Excellence awards which childminders can work towards and which are designed to encourage childminders to develop and improve their services.

During the research interviews childminders also indicated that ongoing learning and development was important to them:



"I do think there should be more emphasis on the fact that new childminders would be better going to the SCMA meetings before filling in the forms, then it wouldn't seem like such a mountain to climb." (Childminder)

"I would say the Care Commission would frown upon it if you weren't doing some sort of course throughout the year." (Childminder)

Parents, however, placed considerably more emphasis on the experience of childminders than on qualifications:

"I think it is important that the childminder is a mother and has that experience. A couple that I interviewed weren't parents but they had a whole big book on mothering on the table and certificates and 'I've been on this course and I'm going on that one'. But it just didn't make me feel any better." (Parent)

Good practice case 9

Every Scottish local authority has set up a Childcare Partnership and a Childcare Information Service (ChIS) to offer information about what care is available to parents and training and support to childcare providers. You can get more information about the Childcare Partnerships and ChISs from www.scotland.gov.uk



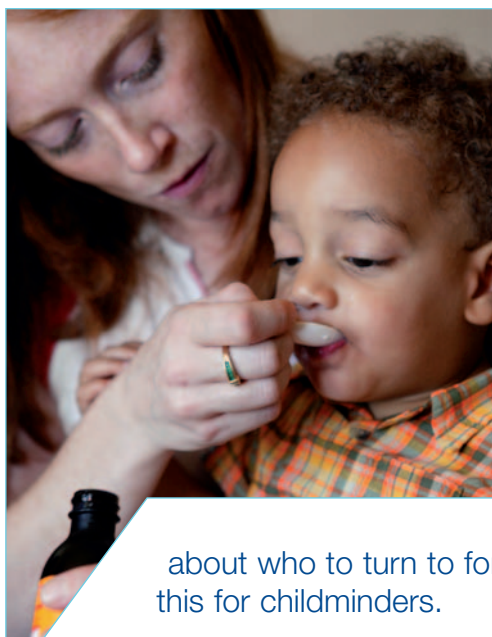
Section 5

**Our conclusions and
recommendations**

Our conclusions and recommendations

This first national report on childminding services in Scotland shows:

- The overall quality of childminding services in Scotland is good
- We have not had to make any requirements against the majority of childminders (78.5% of services had no requirements made against them)
- the number of childminders has fallen over the past four years but this decline is slowing down
- Childminding is still an attractive career option for many people
- 97.4% of parents who responded to our questionnaires were 'happy' or 'very happy' with their childminder.



During our inspections we found a small number of childminders who were not delivering the quality of service that we, or parents, expect. We took enforcement action against only 0.5% of childminders, cancelling their registration in 0.1% of services. Although most childminders did not have any complaints made against them, a small proportion (0.9%) did have a complaint against them upheld.

Childminders commented on the length and complicated nature of the registration process. We have already taken steps, in partnership with SCMA, to improve the registration process.

They also felt that there was some confusion about who to turn to for help and we need to consider how we can clarify this for childminders.

Good communication is essential for building up a relationship and making sure children's needs are met. The quality of the relationship between the childminder, the children and their parents is central to the quality of the service. Children need to feel valued and be well cared for, and parents want more information about their child's day with the childminder. Parents would like to give constructive feedback to childminders, although they do

have some concerns about the effect this may have on their relationship with their childminder.

All childminders should make sure that parents know how to make comments or complaints about their childminding service and give them the confidence to do so.

We need to be satisfied that childminders are providing a safe environment for children, and this includes looking for evidence that childminders are taking fire safety precautions. We found that the most common requirement we made was about fire safety, with childminders either not performing regular fire drills and alarm tests, or not keeping records that they had done so.

Healthy eating is very important to young children, but there was evidence in our findings that parents do not know if their child is getting healthy food when they are with their childminder.

Parents and childminders have also indicated that they need us to communicate better with them, for example giving them clearer information on what we do.

Our main recommendations are:

Childminders should:

- Communicate more effectively with parents about their children and about the service they provide, as parents will often be able to identify ways to improve how the childminder cares for their child
- Encourage feedback from parents and children and make sure they have a complaints procedure in place that parents know how to use
- Carry out regular fire drills, test their fire alarms regularly, and keep records of these tests
- Only care for the number of children they have registered with us for and be aware that we will take swift action if they do not do this
- Improve the service they offer by developing their skills, for example through training courses
- Work with parents to understand their children's nutritional requirements and to offer a choice of healthy food.

Parents should:

- Be aware of the National Care Standards and discuss them with their childminder to help develop the service the childminder is offering
- Read inspection reports and discuss them with their childminder
- Raise comments and complaints with their childminder so they can improve their service, and use our complaints procedure if they have to.

We should:

- Continue to scrutinise childminding services in a way that gives parents confidence in them and encourages childminders to continuously improve
- Carry out more unannounced inspections and inspections at short notice
- Find more ways to make our processes easier for childminders. For example, we have already worked with SCMA to shorten our application forms for new childminders and now provide more advice and support during the registration process
- Find more ways to involve parents, carers and children in the way we regulate childminders and in improving childminding services
- Promote training and support for childminders in partnership with other organisations such as the Childcare Partnerships and SCMA
- Work with partners, such as the Scottish Executive and the SCMA to produce clear information about our respective roles for childminders and parents.

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scottish commission for
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