

**Early Years Childcare Provision in
Rural Local Authorities in England:
An examination of factors that support childminders
in the development of a quality service.**

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Abstract.

This thesis aims to identify factors that have supported childminders living in rural English local authorities in achieving 'outstanding' home-based childcare. The Childcare Act 2006 legislated for the integration of childminders into the English education system through the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2008. Since 2005, childminders have been judged against the same Ofsted criteria and standards required of all early years providers.

In 1999, the New Labour government announced a commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020. Parents in employment were regarded as vital to the reduction of poverty, and along with nurseries and preschools, childminders were essential for ensuring sufficient childcare was available to meet parents' needs. Childminders have been portrayed as offering inferior provision. Research has shown that it is high quality early years provision that enhances the lifelong chances of disadvantaged children.

A mixed method survey was used. A questionnaire was sent to all English local authorities. 'Outstanding' Ofsted reports of childminders in the rural local authority with the highest number of 'outstanding' judgements were analysed, as were those of the 55 'outstanding' childminders with whom telephone interviews were conducted and who lived in 18 rural local authorities.

Findings identified vastly disparate support for childminders, both between local authorities as well as between providers within the same local authority. A structured local authority network, incorporating quality assurance, was most effective in supporting childminder progression; however, the study found most childminders have limited or no access to networks. Childminders report their childminder colleagues, qualification training and previous experiences offered most support.

This study provides a perspective of childminders which has hitherto been lacking; that of articulate, educated, reflective, committed professionals.

The study shows that proposed changes for childminder regulation and inspection are premised on false claims and show a disregard for international research and policy.

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Glossary and definitions.

Acronym	Full term	Definition
ACRE	Action with Communities in Rural England.	A charity which supports sustainable rural community development.
CPD	Continuing Professional Development.	Ongoing development of knowledge and skills in order to maintain relevant professional expertise.
CWDC	Children’s Workforce Development Council.	A non-departmental public body established in 2005 to support the government’s ‘Every Child Matters’ strategy. CWDC’s work was transferred to the Department for Education as part of the Teaching Agency (TA) on April 1 st , 2012.
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government.	Sets policy on supporting local government; communities and neighbourhoods; regeneration; housing; planning, building and the environment; and fire.
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families.	Title of the government department from 2007 – 2010.

DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.	Defra, identified thus on official documentation, is a government department in the United Kingdom.
DES	Department for Education and Science.	Title of the government department before 1992.
DfE	Department for Education.	Title of the government department since May 2010.
DFE	Department For Education.	Title of the government department from July 1992 – July 1995.
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment.	Title of the government department from July 1995 – June 2001.
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care.	The integration of both education and care to create holistic provision for children.
ECERS	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale.	An assessment scale to evaluate provision for children from two to five years of age.
ECM	Every Child Matters.	A government initiative launched in 2002 with the intention of building a framework of integrated services to support and improve the lives of children and young people.

EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-school Education.	A longitudinal study of the effects of pre-school education for three and four year olds. Begun in 1997, the Final Report was published in November 2004.
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage.	The statutory framework setting out standards for learning, development and care for all children from birth to five to be met by all early years providers.
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status.	A graduate professional status for practitioners working at the Foundation Stage, with children from birth to five. EYPS was introduced in 2007.
FCCERS	Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale.	An assessment scale to evaluate the provision of home-based childcare.
GCE	General Certificate of Education.	An academic qualification achieved through examinations. Generally, 'Ordinary' or 'O' level was taken by pupils at sixteen years of age; 'Advanced' or 'A' level at eighteen years of age.

ITERS	Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale.	An assessment scale to evaluate provision for children from birth to two and a half years of age.
LA	Local Authority.	This title replaced Local Education Authority on 5 th May 2010 as part of The Local Education and Children's Services Authorities (Integration of Functions) Order 2010 (legislation.gov.uk., online).
LSOA	Lower Layer Super Output Areas.	Measurement used for reporting local statistics. Small areas with a minimum of 1000 residents and averaging 1500 residents, they are reasonably consistent in size and not subject to regular boundary changes.
NCMA	National Childminding Association.	A charity for childminders, founded by childminders in 1977.
NNEB	National Nursery Examination Board.	A Level 3 diploma in childcare.
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification.	Awards based on National Occupational Standards describing 'competencies' of a specific job role.

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.	Organisation of 34 countries with the aim of promoting policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.	Ofsted, identified thus on official documentation, is the non-ministerial government department of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England.
PLA	Preschool Learning Alliance.	Formerly Pre-school Playgroup Association.
PVI	Private, Voluntary and Independent.	The name given to the range of early years care and education providers.
URN	Unique Reference Number.	Childminders' individual registration numbers issued by Ofsted.

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Chapter One: Introduction.

"The journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step..."

Lao Tzu.

1.1. INTRODUCING THE THESIS.

September 2008 was significant, for myself and for childminders, the group of early years practitioners chosen as the focus for my Doctoral study. As I began my research journey, change and challenge was occurring within my working environment. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2008a) a new, legally enforceable framework was introduced in September 2008 to which all practitioners and providers registered with the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) and working with children from birth to five were required to adhere. The Childcare Act 2006 had placed a duty on English Local Authorities (LA) to improve the well-being of young children and reduce inequalities, introducing the Early Years Foundation Stage through which this would be achieved. In September 2008, childminders were incorporated into the early years workforce, seen as a key element of government strategy that sought to reduce child poverty (Pugh, 2010). Parents in employment were regarded as vital to the reduction of poverty and childminders were, along with other childcare providers, crucial in ensuring there were sufficient childcare places. Experiencing high quality childcare was seen as fundamental "to 'narrowing the gap' in attainment between the highest and lowest achieving children" (Fauth, Jelcic, Lea, Willmott and Owen, 2011, p.6).

Childminding had developed in a fragmented fashion, the responsibility for regulation moving from health authorities (1948) to social services departments (1975) within separate LAs with individual criteria before National Care Standards were set out in 2000 and Ofsted assumed the role of inspection in 2001. Childminders, who provide home-based childcare

were, from September 2008, responsible for delivering the EYFS and offering comparable provision to that of preschools, nurseries and foundation stage classes. I had perceived a disparity of support for childminders between LAs and for childcare providers within individual LAs; however, childminders were being judged against the same standards during Ofsted inspections.

Working as an early years advisory teacher within rural English LAs I thought practitioners working in such areas were further disadvantaged due to barriers that living in remote and isolated locations presented. Compact urban LAs offer more accessible support and amenities, suggesting childminders had greater opportunity of achieving an 'outstanding' Ofsted judgement. Nonetheless, there were childminders living in rural LAs achieving 'outstanding' outcomes despite the apparent inequality. I believed that by exploring the practice of this group of practitioners, elements could be identified that facilitated the development of quality home-based provision and recommendations made to influence LA policy and the structure of support offered to childminders.

Therefore, this thesis asked the questions:

What factors enable childminders working in rural English LAs to achieve 'outstanding' practice?

How can 'outstanding' childminders contribute to the development of childminding practice and provision?

1.2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.

This thesis is structured in the following way. Chapter One sets the political, personal and professional contexts in which I conducted the thesis, followed in Chapter Two with an historical overview of childcare provision. Childminding *per se* has not emerged with a theoretical background (Owen,

2007). Ofsted inspection for childminders was introduced in 2001; childminders were only integrated into the education system in 2008. Currently suggestions are being proposed that this progress should be reversed; that childminders should not be inspected in the same way (House of Commons, 2012), should be de-regulated and not required to follow the EYFS (Truss, 2011). Knowledge of the development of the childminding profession provides an understanding of the implications for such proposals. An analysis of recent childminder research concludes the chapter.

Chapter Three, sets out the underpinning rationale of the research process. The values and beliefs that have influenced my positionality are explored. A mixed method survey was chosen for this study, making it possible to examine in depth the situation of childminders practising in rural LAs to gain a greater understanding of their experience.

Chapter Four reports the results from the questionnaire that was sent to all English LAs, findings from the Ofsted result examination and the Ofsted reports analysis.

Chapter Five provides an analysis of the telephone interviews with 55 'outstanding' childminders, bringing together quantitative and qualitative data.

Chapter Six synthesises the findings presented in the previous chapters; the research questions structure the discussion.

Chapter Seven sets out the conclusions drawn from the research and offers recommendations for practice and policy. The ways in which the study has met my aims, added to the body of knowledge and the relevance of findings to the current political and economic situation are discussed and suggestions made for areas of future research. A reflection on childminding at the beginning of 2013 concludes the chapter.

The political, personal and professional contexts in which this thesis was conducted will now be presented.

1.3. CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH STUDY.

As I began my research journey, coincidentally the notion of a Learning Journey was resonating within the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008a):

The learning journey

- Learning is a continuous journey through which children build on all those things they have already experienced and come across [in] new and interesting challenges
- Every child's learning journey takes a personal path based on their own individual interests, experiences and the curriculum on offer (DCSF, 2008b, Card 3.2).

For my personal learning journey I chose to study the practice of childminders, a group who, to my mind, seemed not only disadvantaged but also appeared not to have had their work examined in any great depth. Seeking a clearer picture of the 'landscape', the first part of my study can be compared to taking a balloon ride, rising to a viewpoint from which I can survey the position of early years education in England in September 2008 and particularly that of childminders, before entering the field to examine the situation more closely. I will explain the reasons influencing my decision to research this particular area of early years practice and provision.

1.3.i. My personal and professional involvement.

I trained originally as a secondary teacher, teaching students between the ages of 11 to 18. After the birth of my first daughter, I, along with other

teaching friends, started a playgroup. Returning to work as a supply teacher when my second daughter began school, I was asked to work in her class during the summer term. This chance employment was to shape future teaching and, through ongoing professional training that eventually included a Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education and Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) I developed appropriate skills and expertise. I moved from teaching in the Foundation Stage in maintained schools to working as a Local Authority (LA) Advisory Teacher for private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings at the beginning of 2004 and thereafter have held positions that have enabled me to visit PVI and maintained settings and to work with practitioners in several LAs, including as an Area Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, a Children's Centre teacher, an Early Years Professional Assessor and an Early Years Foundation Degree tutor.

My daughters attended local playgroups within walking distance of home; provision was readily available in our small market town and as I did not work, arrangements suited our needs. Before he started school, my son born 11 years after my younger daughter, was cared for by a family friend, happy to become a childminder as it suited her own family commitments. On starting school, he was cared for by a second childminder recommended by another friend. I encountered no difficulties in finding provision and naively assumed that what I was experiencing, during the mid 1970s and early 1980s and again during the 1990s, occurred country-wide.

From 2000 onwards the 'Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage' (Qualification and Curriculum Authority [QCA], 2000) was available for all early years' practitioners working with children from three to five years of age; however, working in a school situated in a compact Unitary Authority in the East of England, I had limited knowledge and understanding of how this document was used beyond our boundaries. Moving from the maintained into the PVI sector raised my awareness of the inequalities existing within early years education for children and practitioners, not only because I was

meeting and supporting people who had received no or scant basic training, had few early childhood qualifications yet were being directed to follow the guidance, but also because I had moved into a large rural county. Most preschool provision was organised through private business, which tended to be full day nurseries, or committee run playgroups that had charitable status through the Preschool Learning Alliance (PLA), apart from the county town where there were nurseries attached to schools. I was part of a team of early years teachers, each supporting the curriculum development of about 40 settings, and creating and delivering training for the whole county. Other teams within the LA provided committee, legal and business expertise. As part of my role I supported a Childminder Network Co-ordinator, consequently visiting and training individual and groups of childminders.

As I was beginning to extend my knowledge within this large, rural LA in 2004, nationally there were developments taking place that were going to impact upon the employment of all involved in working with children and young people in England. Reflecting on this situation, it seemed a frantic period. LAs were assimilating information and instructions from government and concurrently cascading this to the workers in the field (Pugh and Duffy, 2010). It involved changes to the organisation of all services charged with the responsibility of caring for and educating children and young people. Visiting settings, I knew practitioners were wondering what new directives I would bring with me - yet another burden for them to carry. Many had received little training, entering the profession as parent helpers who had become part-time assistants to ensure playgroups continued to function within their rural communities. I was able to attend meetings and access training that to a certain extent illuminated the changes; however, it was my additional studies that gave me the space to develop a greater understanding of the rationale underpinning the changes taking place. Many practitioners working directly with children did not have that knowledge to put their role into perspective and it became an increasingly difficult time for them.

I thought that all LAs responded in a similar way to national directives. Between 2006 and 2009 I worked in two other LAs, one city and one rural and it was then that I became aware of the huge differences in organisation. I also began working as a tutor on a distance Early Years Foundation Degree course and, living in an area that bordered on three LAs, had students from each authority. Students discussed opportunities available to them and were concerned to learn of the disparity in their situations, particularly three childminders who lived close to the city boundary, yet as residents of the neighbouring rural county could not access the services of this LA, instead sometimes having to travel 50 miles or more for equivalent training. I had worked previously in the rural county in which they lived, where childminder support was not organised in the same way as I had experienced previously. Despite having a similar job role, I and other early years teachers within the team, had no involvement in the support and training of childminders.

I found the discrepancy in the support for childminders disturbing; expectations were the same wherever they practised as they were judged by the same criteria when they were inspected by Ofsted; since 2005 the inspection of early years' settings, had been aligned to that of schools (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2005). From September 2008 practitioners were required to follow the EYFS irrespective of their previous knowledge and experience. In the term prior to implementation there were meetings and training, however, the prospect of being forced to follow a curriculum was being met with antagonism by some childminders in many of the sessions I attended. The document stated that, "All types of providers have the potential to deliver the EYFS to an excellent standard" (DCSF, 2008a, p.09). I suggest that it would be difficult to find any practitioner who does not aspire to provide anything other than a high standard, however it seems unrealistic that the majority of childminders working on their own, who already contend with a disparity of support, could achieve the same standards as a teacher in a Foundation Stage classroom who not only held a degree in early years education but also had the school community and the LA structure to sustain their provision and expertise. This is similar to

claiming that everyone has the potential to run the 100 metres in an excellent time without paying due regard to the individual, the training facilities or time available to achieve this goal. It is therefore with this aspiration of the EYFS, and bearing in mind the myriad changes in the early years sector, that I wanted to learn more about the position in which childminders found themselves and identify the factors that have enabled practitioners in rural areas to achieve quality practice.

1.3.ii. The political context.

Early years education has achieved an unprecedented status and recognition within the first decade of the twenty-first century that has had a wide ranging impact upon children, families, practitioners, LAs and training providers. The Government has changed since 2008. The Coalition government, formed in May 2010 from the two parties (Conservative and Liberal Democrat) that were previously in opposition, called for a Review of early years education to “cover four main areas: Scope of regulation...; Learning and Development...; Assessment...; Welfare....” (Teather, 2010, Column 6WS) resulting in the Tickell Review (2011) and a revised framework for the EYFS, to be implemented in September 2012 and the Nutbrown Review (2012a) which reviewed early education and childcare qualifications. Changes resulting from these two reviews are likely to further impact upon childminders, however it is the legislation and parliamentary business of the previous (Labour) government’s three terms of office that has shaped the situation that is pertinent to my study.

The New Labour government, elected in 1997, introduced a Green Paper ‘Meeting the Childcare Challenge’ setting out proposals to address the lack of cohesion in childcare services. Whilst recognising there was good quality provision it stated that, “Childcare has been neglected for too long” (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 1998a, p.3) resulting in

a fragmented and under resourced sector. The aims of the National Childcare Strategy were to raise the quality of care available, make childcare more affordable and more accessible. As well as acknowledging the benefits of good childcare for children themselves, included in the agenda was support for parents and employers. Bussemaker (1997, p.3) suggests the way in which childcare is made available “provides a window” through which family, gender, labour and education policies can be viewed, therefore I shall briefly explore this further. The previous Conservative government had generally considered childcare as the responsibility of mothers who were regarded as having the choice to work or not, therefore, should take on the task of arranging childcare (Bussemaker, 1997, p.14). It was suggested that taking no central responsibility would increase private and voluntary childcare. Randall (1995) argues that childcare is a “supremely *political* question” (p.328) and it was the “demographic time bomb” (Randall, 1995, p.336) that pushed the question of sufficient provision higher up the agenda. The “fertility rate is below replacement levels” (OECD, 2006, p.30), consequently the fall in the number of school leavers and therefore potential workers meant that the workforce had to be supplemented by women returning to work who would not only increase tax revenue (Morgan, 1996, p.iv) but also contribute to the creation of a growth industry - that of childcare. Randall (1996), considering why the feminist movement had not been a greater force in the debate, argued that feminist aspirations of securing life chances and choices could only be achieved if mothers were released from “social subordination” (p.487), however, she suggested that as the movement was predominantly middle-class the structure of childcare provision was perhaps regarded as a reflection of support for the needy working-class rather than an appropriate service members would wish for their own children (Randall, 1996, p.502). Vandebroek, Coussée and Bradt (2010) posit that, “Early childhood education [is] a site where the political and the personal intersect” (p.148). Faure et al. (1972) considering the future needs of education, stated that expanding economies would need a greater number of skilled workers; I would argue that the inclusion of women, many of whom had been part of the skilled workforce before motherhood, was fundamental to continued economic growth (Greener,

2009; Wong, 2007). The connection between childcare and economic growth has been clearly made by linking current investment in early years to future rewards in the global economy (The Stationery Office [TSO], 2009; The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006).

As well as economic considerations, events occurring during the first parliamentary term of the Labour government had a profound effect on social policies. In 1993 black teenager Steven Lawrence, was killed following a racist attack by white peers, prompting an official inquiry, as did the death of eight year old Victoria Climbié, killed by her carers in 2000. Recommendations from the reports of these inquiries – the Macpherson Report (1999) and the Laming Report (2003) - were the catalyst for the debate, consultation and evaluation providing the basis of ‘Every Child Matters Green Paper’ (TSO, 2003) and the ensuing Children Act 2004 (Office of Public Sector Information [OPSI], 2004) which provided the “legislative framework for whole system reform” (DfES, 2004, p.2).

‘Every Child Matters: Change for Children’ (DfES, 2004), published on the same day as the Children Act 2004 (OPSI, 2004) set out the national framework detailing the government’s proposals for achieving their programme of reform, further developed in ‘Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy plan’ (DCSF, 2006). Education was located in a partnership of agencies that together were offered a “once in a generation chance to transform opportunities, services and support for children, young people and families” (DfES, 2004, p.4). Central to the vision for change were five inter-dependent outcomes (DfES, 2004).

A myriad of reports, strategy and guidance documents followed, detailing the way in which the government’s vision was to be implemented. The EYFS was central to implementing change and was introduced in the Childcare Act

2006 (OPSI, 2006). A cornerstone of the government's vision was the development of partnership and the creation of a 'net' through which no child should be allowed to fall. All involved in the delivery of services to children and young people were to be included in the 'joined-up' services charged to ensure children were supported to achieve the five outcomes of:

- Being healthy: enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle;
- Staying safe: being protected from harm and neglect;
- Enjoying and achieving: getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood;
- Making a positive contribution: being involved with the community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour;
- Economic well-being: not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life. (DfES, 2003, p.7).

Childminders, found themselves in an unprecedented position in September 2008 when the EYFS was implemented. Many had started working as home childcare providers under the auspices of social services; they now found that their role had changed significantly and they had been drawn into the English education system.

Childminders were contemplating new demands and challenges in their work. From my own professional experience the vastness of some rural LAs create difficulties for all early years practitioners, and for childminders working on their own these problems can be exacerbated.

1.3.iii. Rural reality.

Images of a 'Rural Idyll' (McLaughlin, 1986), masks the deprivation and poverty contained therein; the perception of a rurality that supports a high standard of living and an enviable quality of life has been perpetuated through text (Little and Austin, 1996, p.102) and marketing opportunities (McLaughlin, 1986, p.291).

Little and Austin (1996) assert that the rural idyll is a social construct, “created by and for the entertainment of the wealthy” (p.103). Cloke, Goodwin, Milbourne, and Thomas (1995) argue that terminology has been used to disguise the problem, suggesting that ‘poverty’ was replaced by ‘deprivation’ and ‘deprivation’ was accepted as a lack of opportunities in comparison to urban services; thus communities were not “impoverished by that privation” (p.355). Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) (2010) state that the Index of Multiple Deprivation, used to measure poverty is flawed as the base unit of measurement – the Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOA) (Department for Communities and Local Government [DCLG], 2011) - is not sufficiently detailed to account for small and isolated communities. Consequently, published data misrepresents reality where pockets of high deprivation can be surrounded by affluence. The facade of perfection, perpetuated through picturesque images, can obscure the actuality of the situation. The cover of the statistics published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) (2012) show six idealized photographs, disguising information contained within the report, including that 22% of rural children are living in households below the poverty threshold (p.59). Recognising the challenges faced in rural regions Hobson (2007) highlights the opportunities for research in such areas (p.10).

Matthews, Taylor, Sherwood, Tucker, and Limb (2000) note a disjuncture between the idealised perception of rurality and what they describe as “small, remote, poorly serviced and fractured communities” (p.141). Statistics reveal there is an increase in the infant mortality rate in rural areas going against the national trend which has decreased since 2003. There are higher transport costs; an average of 10,000 miles travelled annually which is 53% more than the urban population (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [DEFRA], 2012, p.65); 47% bus availability compared to 91% in urban areas (DEFRA, 2012, p.68); no or slow broadband in 25% of all households, despite the acknowledgement that, “Broadband is important for the economic and social sustainability of rural communities” (DEFRA, 2012, p.50), and the median earnings of work based employees is £19,370 which is more than £7,000 below the national figure and appears to reflect the

plight of many poorer people in what Mathews et al. (2000) refer to as “a ‘darker’ rural” (p.146).

Childminders, who live in rural areas and who provide quality early years care and education, are in a position to make a significant difference to the life chances of the children living in those areas.

1.3.iv. Quality practice and provision.

A definition of the notion of quality is problematic. Wittek and Kvernbekk (2011, p.672) suggest it is a “political buzzword”, given meaning through the viewpoint of the many stakeholders who seek to justify the concept. Penn (1999) suggests that quality is based upon “core values and beliefs about the nature of the child” that should be continually reviewed with all stakeholders.

In 1997 a longitudinal study, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project, funded by the DfEE, was set up to identify, “The aspects of pre-school provision which have a positive impact on children’s attainment, progress and development, and so provide guidance on good practice” (Institute of Education, 2011). Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammons and Melhuish (2008) linked quality in early years provision to the Rumbold Report (Her Majesty's Stationery Office [HMSO], 1990, p.31) which states the importance of all providers recognising quality provision and their role in ensuring it is available to children. In 1994, the report ‘Start Right: The Importance of Early Learning’ identifying ‘Quality Indicators’ stated “*high quality* early education ...leads to lasting cognitive and social benefits in children” (Ball, 1994, p.18), and, citing research from other countries, noted that it is the quality of the provision rather than the type of setting that is crucial (Ball, 1994, p.19). The rigorous findings from the EPPE Project confirmed the positive link between high quality provision and better outcomes for young children (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2004). The report specified factors that were identified as

being significant indicators of quality, where quality had been determined by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) (Harms, Cryer and Clifford, 2011). The report acknowledged that quality provision was found in a range of settings and that the qualification of the practitioners had a significant outcome upon the quality of provision. It was also reported that, “Where settings view educational and social development as complementary and equal in importance, children make better all round progress” (Sylva et al., 2004, p.56).

Findings from the evaluation of the Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children (Smith et al., 2009) demonstrated that only attending higher quality settings had impacted upon children’s cognitive and social outcomes; confirming it is not the amount of time spent in a setting but the quality therein (Sylva et al., 2004, p.56). Current government documentation reiterates this point (Department for Education [DfE], 2012a, p.10). Both the ECERS and the Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) (Harms, Cryer and Clifford, 2006) were used as quality indicators in the Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children evaluation; the report notes that the quality analysis differs from the Ofsted inspection framework and suggests correlation between the two could support future improvement (Smith et al., 2009, p.86). The authors note that children attending settings that have achieved an Ofsted outcome of at least ‘good’ should receive a positive benefit, thus suggesting that this could be a baseline for a quality judgement. Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2012) examined the views of parents, providers and LAs; they suggested their identification of quality elements could be used by policy makers to ensure desired outcomes are achieved (p.10). Mathers et al. (2012) acknowledged that whilst there are schemes against which quality is measured, such as Environment Rating Scales (Harmes et al., 2011; Harmes et al., 2006) and LA quality assurance schemes, only Ofsted is an official regulatory body. Mathers et al.’s (2012) research concurred that high quality staffing was paramount inasmuch that parents “could trust [practitioners] to take care of their children’s needs” (Mathers et al., 2012, pp.33-34). Although the research of Mathers et al.

(2012) was carried out in nursery settings, “Some parents used words like ‘homely’, ‘family’ and ‘love’ when describing quality care” (Mathers et al., 2012, p.34). Comments highlighted, such as, “A lot of them are mums, they are people you see in the playground. They have ‘life experience’ and ‘I think it comes from their heart’” (Mathers et al., 2012, p.35) are echoed in following chapters. Provider focus groups identified the importance of “staff having a deep-seated desire to do the job” (Mathers et al., 2012, p.40) and parents’ suggestions that information in an Ofsted report should reflect views of parents (Mathers et al., 2012, p.51), resonates in following chapters.

The need for knowledgeable practitioners to ensure quality practice recurs throughout the reports (Mathers et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Sylva et al., 2004; Ball, 1994; HMSO, 1990). Nutbrown (2012a) stating it is the workforce that influences the quality of provision, notes that, “Necessary skills, knowledge and understanding are a crucial element of that quality” (p.5).

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS.

This thesis seeks to examine the following questions:

What factors enable childminders working in rural English LAs to achieve ‘outstanding’ practice?

How can ‘outstanding’ childminders contribute to the development of childminding practice and provision?

The following sub-questions were used to examine the thesis in depth:

1. Does the support for childminders differ between LAs and if so, how?
2. Is there a link between the support offered by LAs and the number of childminders achieving ‘outstanding’ practice?

3. What are the common elements of effective childminder practice identified in Ofsted reports of childminders working in rural LAs?
4. How do childminders in rural LAs characterise quality provision?
5. What sources of support do rural childminders feel have impacted upon their practice leading to an 'outstanding' Ofsted judgement?
6. Do 'outstanding' childminders use their knowledge, understanding and expertise to support and influence other childminders, and in what ways?

1.5. AIMS OF THE STUDY.

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the challenges, successes, difficulties and demands on early years practitioners living in rural English LAs who provide home-based childcare. Childminders are categorised as a homogeneous group concealing the diversity of the circumstances in which they work. The childminding role has evolved with great expectations being placed upon practitioners; however, the variation in service and support offered to childminders from LAs suggests it might be more difficult for some than others. Childminders are being judged on a par with graduate Foundation Stage teachers and settings that have several practitioners to take on the many roles and responsibilities of a childcare provider, for which a childminder has sole accountability.

The nature of childminding means that the majority of practitioners are lone workers which can create isolation as well as exacerbate difficulties such as the inequitable support they are offered by LAs. The long hours worked, the physical needs of very young children, the demands of meeting the diverse childcare requirements of individual families and the anxiety of maintaining a sustainable business are all problems that childminders have to face (Fauth et al., 2011; Greener, 2009). Those practising in rural areas are further

disadvantaged. Isolation can be physical as well as professional; setting location can create accessibility problems for the childminder as well as the LA supporting them. Practitioners with whom I have worked in the past had difficulty accessing afternoon and evening training, for example, the bus service did not run after 3.15pm through the village in which they lived.

The decision to focus on childminders working within rural English LAs was made because:

- I had observed disparate support for childminders practising in rural LAs;
- compact urban LAs offer more accessible support and amenities, suggesting childminders in rural LAs had fewer opportunities available to them to support the development of quality practice;
- I had encountered a lack of knowledge and understanding by LA officers of the reality of living and working in rural locations;
- the isolation of lone working is further exacerbated by the remoteness of settings;
- there are pockets of high deprivation within rural communities resulting in 22% of rural children living in households below the poverty threshold (DEFRA, 2012, p.59), therefore, childminders practising in rural areas and who provide quality early years care and education, are in a position to make a significant difference to the life chances of the children living in those areas.

In comparison to other areas of early years provision, there appears to be limited research literature available (Barker, 2012; Fauth et al., 2011; Owen, 2007; Mooney, Knight, Moss and Owen, 2001) yet this section of the early years workforce has been given a major role in achieving the vision of universal childcare availability and in supporting young children's development. Whilst recognising the availability of international literature,

the decision was made to focus on literature pertinent to this country. I considered the diversity of LA early years provision and the way in which childminding has developed, to be unique to this country.

This thesis has the following aims:

1. To examine the provision offered to childminders from LA Children's Services.
2. To explore the extent of support available to childminders.
3. To investigate the links between support childminders receive and their practice.
4. To analyse documents to identify common themes of quality.
5. To synthesize elements of data analysis to determine factors that support childminders in developing quality practice and provision.
6. To propose ways in which childminders can be further supported to develop quality practice and provision.

1.6. SUMMARY.

This chapter has set out the political and personal contexts in which this thesis is located. I have discussed my professional role in the early years' workforce. The concepts of rurality and quality have been explored. The aims of the study have been defined and the research questions specified, with detailed sub-questions providing specific areas of investigation. I now turn to an examination of the literature in which I first offer an historical overview and consider ways in which the care of young children has been addressed in England, before analysing more recent research.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review.

“The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children”.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (n.d.).

2.1. INTRODUCTION.

Childminders have only recently been incorporated into the English education system (2008) and are being judged by the same Ofsted criteria as other early years practitioners. To contextualise the current expectations placed on childminders, I sought to gain an understanding of the way in which home-based childcare has developed before examining more recent research studies. Early in my study I read the seminal research undertaken in the 1960s by Brian and Sonia Jackson (1979); this subsequently shaped the structure of the literature review. The impact of their work inspired me to want to learn more of the historical attitudes to the care of young children.

The introduction explains the significance of The Nurseries and Child-Minders Regulation Act 1948 (Great Britain, 1948) for childminders and looks at how the notion of care and education within the childminding role has developed. I will explore the way in which children were cared for prior to the 1948 Act; this is followed by an examination of childminding during the next three decades until the end of the 1980s, which was the time that the care and education of young children began to gain political significance (Lewis, 2012). This chapter concludes with an analysis of recent childminding literature, from the early 1990s to the present day. I have used an historical lens in my discussion of the care of young children; I believe taking account of the past is important. Carr and Hartnett (1996) suggests the “analysis of reform is about past, present and future” (p.3) maintaining that evaluation of current structure needs, in part to be underpinned by

knowledge of past practice, and future planning should be based on an understanding of how the past relates to the present (Graseck, 2008, p.367).

Childminders were first regulated in legal documentation in The Nurseries and Child-Minders Regulation Act 1948 (Great Britain, 1948). Defined as “persons who for reward receive children into their homes to look after them” (Great Britain, 1948, p.1218), the Act pertained to childminders looking after “children of whom he is not a relative and (a) the number of children exceeds two, and (b) the children come from more than one household” (Great Britain, 1948, p.1221). Childminders were required to become registered, the local health authority being responsible for maintaining the register. The terminology ‘look after’ was used in subsequent legislation until the 1989 Children Act (Great Britain, 1989) when ‘provide care’ described the childminding role. It was not until the Care Standards Act 2000 (Great Britain, 2000) and subsequent transfer of the regulatory inspection process to Ofsted in 2001 that ‘care’ became embedded in the terminology. There were fourteen Standards that set out what ‘Care’ for children entailed (DfEE, 2001, pp.5-6). ‘Learning and play’ referred to the education of children and required childminders who were part of an accredited network to “understand and use the Early Learning Goals” (DfEE, 2001, p.9) that were set out in the ‘Curriculum Guidance for the foundation stage’ (QCA, 2000) a non-statutory requirement.

The recognition that care and education are inextricably intertwined was endorsed by the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008a), a statutory framework combining previously separated education and welfare requirements (DfEE, 2003; DfES, 2002; QCA, 2000). Rousseau (1762/1915, para.39/1915) referred to the Greek translation of ‘education’ as ‘nurture’; Hadow (Board of Education, 1933) notes the discussion on “the proper nurture of young children” (p.116) within the report. The combination of care and education encompasses the notion of nurture.

Bonhoeffer's quotation with which I began this chapter seemed apt as I began to read and even more relevant as a recent proposal to split care from education has been made (House of Commons, 2012). Additionally, MP Elizabeth Truss, appointed Early Years Minister in the Coalition government in September 2012, began campaigning for the adoption of the childminding system currently in place in Holland (Truss, 2012a). Current suggestions of de-regulation, exclusion from the requirements of the EYFS and the relaxation of informal arrangements (Truss, 2012a, pp.7-8) appear to be a retrograde step (Roberts, 2012), considered by many to reverse the professionalism hard won by this sector of the childcare workforce (Lloyd and Shukla, 2012). Having worked with childminders as colleagues, practitioners and students during the last few years I understand and share the concern, frustrations and fears.

2.2. HISTORICAL METHODOLOGY.

Jenkins (1991) called for a reflexive methodology, noting that there is a need to "develop a self-consciously held (and acknowledged) position" (p.82). When considering the empirical element of this study I understood the need to examine and explain my own position and the influences that had formed my opinions; until reading the work of Tosh with Lang (2006) I had not realised the significance of relationships between comprehension and interpretation of historical evidence. I am therefore alert to Jenkins' (1991) assertion that interpretation of information is constructed by the reader who is influenced by their own present (p.15).

2.3. PROVISION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN PRIOR TO THE NURSERIES AND CHILD-MINDERS REGULATION ACT 1948.

Comenius (1633-1638, in Keatinge, 1907, p.256) and Pestalozzi (1801/1894) were amongst the Great Educators who advocated children remain with their mothers until the age of 6, recognising the learning that occurs at home.

However, this has not been an option for many mothers and so alternative arrangements had to be found and the circumstances children encountered were frequently irreconcilable with the vision shared by educational pioneers.

Jackson and Jackson (1979) noted that the word 'childminder' had not been included in the Oxford English Dictionary until a short time before their research was undertaken (p.15). The Nurseries and Childminders Regulations Act 1948 (Great Britain, 1948) is important to my study for two reasons: the significance it has for later childminders, and the questions it raises concerning the situation for childcare arrangements prior to 1948, which I will now consider.

2.3.i. The impact of the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution, between 1750 and 1850, transformed people's lives as new scientific, technological and socio-political changes occurred. Before this, the population had resided largely in remote feudal villages and hamlets, ruled by an élite dominated by the Church and the nobility (Lawson and Silver, 1973). During the Middle Ages, most children lived with their families and those who did not, were the responsibility of the community or of religious houses (Kellmer Pringle and Naidoo, 1975, p.5). People worked mainly in agriculture, with families labouring on land that was, until that time, regarded as collectively owned (Blomley, 2007, p.5). The introduction of land enclosure and the 1845 General Enclosure Act, heralded the introduction of a new social order that dispossessed the majority. Children had worked with their parents, whilst those considered too young to help were left on their own to fend for themselves or under the care of another young child, frequently with disastrous consequences. Cunningham (2006, p.40) documented the death of a three year old while in the care of her five year old sister noting that such stories can be learned from coroners' inquests or from accounts of miracles at shrines. Cunningham (2006) suggested that from the age of four, children were less likely to suffer

accidental death and surmised it could have been that the children thereafter spent more time with their mother (p.40). As the Industrial Revolution gathered pace, families moved to the towns and cities in which large factories were being built to house the power driven machinery and which offered the hope of employment. At the same time as this mass relocation of population, medical advancement was not only prolonging life expectancy but also ensuring more babies survived their first few years. Hence the population who were predominantly scattered around the countryside in 1700, grew from about five and a half million - estimated from the records of births, deaths and marriages - rising to 8,331,434 in 1801, the first recorded census and doubling to 16,921,888 in 1851 (HMSO, 1843, p.37) the majority of whom were now crowded into growing conurbations.

2.3.ii. Early examples of care provision for children of working mothers.

Joseph Oberlin is recognized as establishing the first infant school in 1769 in the Vosges region of Alsace where the youngest played whilst older children were taught to spin, knit and sew by conductrices (Board of Education, 1933, p.2). The inspiration for Oberlin's model was said to have come from a visit to a home in which he saw a girl sitting spinning with a group of children around her whom she kept occupied by singing and talking to them as she worked. Oberlin realised that by creating centres where mothers could safely leave their children whilst they worked on the land or fulfilled other duties, social reform, which empowered the mothers, could be initiated. The pedagogical talents of some of the mothers were used to teach both children and mothers (Singer, 1992, p.19). In her discussion of Oberlin's impact on the development of early childhood care and education, Singer (1992) suggests there were three significant influential themes, that of social reform, recognition of the importance of the early years and the role of women and mothers; I maintain they remain so today.

In the United Kingdom there were individuals who recognised the impact of industrialisation on family circumstances. Robert Owen, a mill owner in New Lanark, Scotland was credited for establishing the first school for infants in Great Britain in 1818 (The Open University, 2004a; Board of Education, 1933, p.2). Owen (1816) criticised the upper classes for failing to recognise the relationship between the actions of the powerful minority in society and the impact on the majority poor and disenfranchised. Owen believed reform should be embedded in universal education established from infancy. Owen created a 'New Institution', a building with an enclosed area outside that was a place of safety for children, in which they were free to play under supervision whilst their parents worked in the mill. Children attended as soon as they were able to walk until they began their schooling. Whilst many visitors to the model 'baby school' recognised the benefits for working mothers, there were some who perceived the project as a system of indoctrination and control, and as a method of achieving greater efficiency and profit in a highly competitive industry. Whilst recognising this argument I would disagree with this contention for two reasons. In an age of no financial support other than income earned by families, working would have been a necessity for many mothers, and childcare, as this thesis goes on to discuss, was problematic for parents; Owen had created a safe provision. The second reason is the record of Owen's contributions to parliamentary business in relation to alleviating the lot of the poor and the exploitation of children.

2.3.iii. The consequence of poverty.

Poverty was considered to be an individual's responsibility, irrespective of circumstances over which they had no control (United Kingdom Parliament, n.d.). Pauperism was addressed through the 1601 Poor Law, revised in 1834, which legislated for families to be removed into workhouses where they were kept in deplorable conditions. There was provision for children to be taken from families and placed in the workhouse when it was deemed

they were not receiving sufficient care from their family – or indeed if their family had abandoned them, “A policy towards deprived children which persisted for over 300 years: removal from the community to institutional care” (Kellmer Pringle and Naidoo, 1975, p.5). Children born out of wedlock were frequently left in the workhouse, their existence being considered not only bringing shame on God (His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1905, 1.7.3. p.12) but also a drain on local Poor Law funds. A publication notes that, “The Poor Law...authorised the [workhouse] guardians to supply the factories with young children from five or six years old, like cattle or sheep, at so much a head, without the slightest restriction” (Hird, 1906, p.31). It was under these unforgiving conditions that families struggled to survive.

Publications and Parliamentary documentation provide an insight into the lives of young children when the notion of childhood was very different to that in England at the beginning of the twenty-first century. I will first return to the agricultural regions and then look in more depth at the industrial areas.

A Command Paper of 1843, noted that children were generally apprenticed at seven years of age, though young children would help on family allotments. The report acknowledged the dilemma faced by mothers who worked long hours in the fields, especially those without extended families; the harmful effect this had on the children was contemplated inasmuch as “they are neglected in every way, morally and physically” (Austin, Denison, Doyle and Vaughn, 1843, p.26). Special assistant Poor Law Commissioners gave evidence of children left in the care of eight or nine year old siblings or with a child of similar age who was paid by the mother. A Commissioner commented on the fatal accidents happening to children locked in houses and recounted the words of an interviewee, considered to be a virtuous mother who worked hard to support her large family:

I have always left my children to themselves, and, God be praised! nothing has ever happened to them, though I have thought it dangerous. I have many a time come home and have thought it a mercy to find nothing has happened to them (Austin et al., 1843, p.26).

In the industrial areas, for a large proportion of the population, life was desperate; very young children worked to contribute to the family income. Robert Owen, reporting to the Select Committee on the State of Children employed in the Manufactories in 1818, noted the employment of a three year old in a cotton mill. When questioned if this was in fact conceivable he replied:

It is possible and very probable, and the way in which many of these infants are first employed is to pick up the waste cotton from the floor; to go under the machines, where bigger people cannot creep, and the smaller they are the more conveniently they can go under the machines (Peel, 1816, p.88).

Hird (1906) referred to the 1843 Report of the Commission of Enquiry into child labour noting it “revealed a revolting and scandalous state of affairs” (p.32). The evidence presented was rejected by some and was subsequently opposed in some Parliamentary pamphlets as being “excessively erroneous and unjust” (Baines, 1843, p.6). Examination of the first report relating to mines, expose instances of very young children working underground; for example, in Halifax a three year old was “made to follow [his father] to the workings, there to hold the candle, and when exhausted with fatigue was cradled upon the coals until his return at night” (Tooke, 1842, p.14). A Mines Agent reported that in the in South Wales’ mines “many young boys are taken into the mines as soon as they can stand on their legs” (Tooke, 1842, p.21). The second report, concerned with trades and manufacture, documents an “instance in which an infant under two was thus regularly employed [in lace making] by its mother” (Tooke, 1843, p.10). Three children from the Nottingham, Leicester and Derby area, aged eight, six and four worked from 6am until 10pm – the four year old until 6pm. The two older girls began working at four years old, the four year old at two. A Sub-Commissioner stated that five year old children were able to “perform the [pin making] operation as well as eight or nine year old children” (Tooke, 1842, p.7) and were working in factories in the Warrington area, noting that, “Pin-heading can be done by a child as soon as it has the use of its arm and legs” (Tooke, 1842, p.7).

Hird (1906, p.33) described how master chimney sweeps acquired children – through abduction, or through sales from parents or the guardians of workhouses - to work as climbing boys and girls from as young as five. Bennett, when bringing his 1818 ‘Bill for the better regulation of chimney sweepers and their apprentices; and for preventing the employment of boys in climbing chimnies’ (*sic*) to the House of Commons reported how, in order to save fuel, chimneys were being constructed “so small they could only be ascended by boys of a very tender age” (Anon., 1818, p.3).

The precarious life of canal children was reported to a Select Committee of 1883; evidence from George Smith of Coalville recorded a blind girl “of some twelve winters...she was steering with one hand, and in her other arm was a child of a few months old”. The mother was leading horses and the father steering the boat ahead; the family had “lost three children by drowning in the canal during the last few years” (Salt, 1883, p.313).

Families had difficult choices; it was common for children to be left alone “right up to the twentieth century” (de Mause, 1974, p.9) and if young children were not with the parents they were left to wander, often named ‘Street Arabs’, likened to Bedouin tribes, remarkable in their “mobility and independence ...the children...shared these characteristics, thought to be highly undesirable in children” (Cunningham, 2006, p.163). An investigator claimed there were about 3,650 roaming the Manchester streets, “shoeless, half-naked, uncombed and dirty little urchins, who from two to six year old and upwards swarm in the streets” (Cunningham, 2006, p.162). Such children were known as “Les Classes Dangereuses” (Shaw, 1843, p.29) in Manchester. Responding to a question raised in the House of Commons in 1835, a Return from the Police Office in Manchester recorded 8,650 deserted children, between 1st August 1832 and 31st July 1835 with an accompanying explanation that:

Because the nature of the employment of Parents in the Cotton Factories [it] prevents their attending personally to their small Children

during the day, and compels them to place the charge in the hands of their older Children, or others, who are not sufficiently attentive to them (Anon., 1836, p.1).

Some parents requested their children should be taken to the factories, recorded as being met, not only to appease the parents, but also with an ulterior motive. A Somersetshire Silk Mill owner stated that he accepted young children, "Principally to oblige their parents; but also to keep up a succession for the higher purposes of the manufactory" (Peel, 1816, p.73). An inexpensive and biddable workforce of women and children was favoured over men and was "the result of great competition among the mill-owners" (Shaw, 1843, p. 26).

The workhouse was regarded by some as the only childcare option; by others, unthinkable. The Poor Law Commissioners' Report (1834) notes that a Suffolk widower with four children requested they were cared for by the parish whilst he went to sea during the herring fishing season. He was judged not to have made sufficient provision for his absence whilst he had been working on the land, thus, "The committee offered to take charge of two, and that he should provide for the others. This he refused, *and next day he left all his children to the parish*" (Atkinson et al., 1834, p.33). The Standard (Anon., 1853) reports the drowning of a twenty-two year old mother and her three month old baby. Letters left explained that the idea of leaving her child in the workhouse proved too distressing to the young London mother and despite going out to work "could not earn sufficient to support herself and pay [the] witness for minding her child" (Anon., 1853) and consequently took the decision to end both of their lives.

2.3.iv. 'Baby farming'.

Many women chose for their babies and young children to be fostered; for some mothers this option was taken to avoid the stigma of illegitimacy whilst for others it was the only childcare available to them. This practice of

accepting a single or ongoing payment became known as 'Baby-farming'. There were shocking examples of neglect which resulted in the deaths of very many children both through ignorance and intent however, few charges of murder were pursued and where this occurred, the criminals convicted often had derisory penalties imposed, if any. A Coroner's Inquest held in Newbury in 1867 cites convulsion through teething as the cause of death of a seven month old child, however it was noted that the child was improperly fed. On hearing of the deaths of three of the four illegitimate children the minder Mrs Hamblin had been engaged to nurse, the coroner is reported to have said:

It appeared to him to be a very improper state of things that the rate payers of the borough should be called upon to bear the cost of medical attendance upon illegitimate children whose mothers lived in other parts of the country (Anon., 1867a).

Malnourishment and neglect was common and the devastating consequences exacerbated the effects of disease. Phillips (1978) describes the variety of inappropriate feed offered to babies, such as a bread and water pap or a mixture of cereal and liquid which, when offered as a sole diet, was unlikely to have sustained life. The administering of drugs was prevalent and born of necessity; mothers had to return to work within the first four weeks after the birth, leaving babies with inappropriate carers or locked in their homes. However, the practice of drugging infants with opium, which had the effect both of keeping the baby quiet and lessening the distress from hunger, frequently resulted in death from a drug overdose or choking on the sponge which had been dipped in laudanum and tied to the baby's mouth. Such deaths would subsequently be recorded as from teething or convulsions (D'Cruze, 1995, p.59; Phillips, 1978, p.162). These causes of death were regularly recorded appearing to make convictions difficult, as was explained by the judge when summing up the case against Tranmere baby-farmers John and Catherine Barnes in 1879; the jury being advised, "It would not be safe to find the prisoners guilty of murder unless they were convinced that the intention was present in their minds to cause the deaths of these children" (Anon., 1879). It took the jury twenty-one minutes to record the

verdict of manslaughter by starvation and neglect of three children against both prisoners. During the trial, the court had learned of the disappearance of thirty to forty children that had been given to the prisoners and of whom there was no trace.

Whilst the lucrative trade of 'Baby Farming' provided both a means of earning a wage for many unscrupulous people and simultaneously addressing society's problem of illegitimacy, it was used by some mothers as their only childcare option. A reporter in *The Examiner* (Anon., 1871) states that a House of Commons Committee was at great pains to differentiate between the two classes of childminders – the first category "...where children are put out for hire with the deliberate knowledge that they will be sure to die very quickly" and the second category:

Those cases 'where the children are *bonâ fide* entrusted to the care of others, either in the daytime or by the week, that the mothers may return to work, and be able to carry on their usual employment'. This distinction between the criminal and non-criminal class of cases is essential, as having a direct bearing on the remedies to be applied (Anon., 1871, pp.823-4).

Infants whose mothers entered agreements under what they believed to be the second category were vulnerable. *The Morning Post* (Anon., 1867b) reports the inquest into the death of a baby. The mother who visited the baby twice each week paid Mrs Thorne, the minder, almost half her wages. The child died; however, despite the fact that three children had died in the minder's care during the previous twelve months, a verdict of death through "congestion of the lungs, from want of natural nourishment and care on the part of Mrs Thorne" (Anon., 1868a) was recorded. *Reynold's Newspaper* (Anon., 1868b) reported the concern of the jury who advocated a change to "the system of baby-farming" and asked that the Coroner write to the Home Secretary. In another article about the case, the *Glasgow Herald* (1868) labelled baby farming "...an ugly blot on social life" rueing that, "There seems scarcely any possibility of counteracting the evil" (Anon., 1868a).

This fatalistic approach was shared by many, yet some articles called for action to be taken to address the problem of cared-for children. One such treatise was written by Charles Dickens (1849) following the death of 155 children from Asiatic cholera at Tooting Pauper Establishment during December 1848 and January 1849 (Phillips, 1978, p.162). In a contemptuous attack, Dickens highlighted the action of the coroner who refused to hold inquests into the deaths of the children; the flouting of regulations; the neglect of and violence against the children and the appalling privations the children suffered. The York Herald (Anon., 1867c) printed an article that called for, "All places where children are received for bringing-up apart from the charge of their mothers, should be properly registered and strictly watched". Publicity following the conviction and execution of Margaret Waters in 1870 supported the call for reform (Owen, 2005, p.59). The Examiner (Anon., 1871, pp.823-4) reported proceedings to the House of Commons from a Select Committee appointed following this case and called for a Bill to be forthcoming at the earliest opportunity.

2.3.v. Early legislation to protect children.

In 1872 the Infant Life Protection Bill was placed before Parliament with the proposition, "It is expedient to make better provision for the protection of infants entrusted to persons to be nursed or maintained for hire or reward..." (Charley, Brewer, and Lyon Playfair, 1872, p.1). The Bill, which became law on 1st November 1872, set out restrictions that stated anyone taking in more than one child of less than 12 months, for more than 24 hours and receiving a payment required a licence. Licensees were to provide proper food and lodging; the licence was valid for one year and all children had to be registered, the document to be produced when required; all deaths had to be reported to the coroner unless a medical death certificate had been issued and no child buried without this.

Later publications showed that the law was being flouted and minders were using childcare for gain; recording a “death from natural causes from ignorance” (Anon., 1890, p.8), the Coroner learned that a minder had taken out insurance on the child’s life without the knowledge of the parents. In the same year, Benjamin Waugh, founder in 1885 of the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, wrote the pamphlet ‘Baby-farming’ in which he described the Society’s investigation into the problem. He reflected that:

There seemed to be the impression that of late years baby-farming had gone down; that since the Life Protection Act was passed, things were better. It was my own impression that the trade was still as large and as bad as ever, though it was more skilfully conducted (Waugh, 1890, p.701).

Waugh (1890) described the process of procurement. He claimed that, “Few Acts are more profoundly misunderstood” than the Infant Life Protection Act of 1872 (Waugh, 1890, p.712) and considered it had taught the “farmers” how to evade the law. In Waugh’s pamphlet it is apparent that parents were not always knowledgeable of, or complicit in, the deaths of their children – his attention had been drawn to a wet-nurse arrangement made by a Member of Parliament (MP). The MP who was accompanying Waugh on a visit, found a hovel in which his baby was kept; further investigation revealed his emaciated baby with the owner of the room and another baby in a drinking den. The minder had received the baby from the appointed wet-nurse. Waugh (1890) called for a proper ‘Care of Children Bill’.

The Infant Life Protection Act was amended in 1897 (Great Britain, 1897) and placed the responsibility for enforcement on local authorities that had been created through the Local Government Act, 1888 (Great Britain, 1888). However, despite this Act, records show cases of unregistered minders receiving minimum punishment at the beginning of the last century.

The 1908 Children Act (Great Britain, 1908) was a significant law, legislating for the registration of any child under seven cared for by an adult receiving

payment and setting out the regulations for fostering, in an attempt to make baby-farming illegal. This Act, combined with the 1894 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, was known as the Children's Charter and was the first move in this country towards acknowledging the rights of the child.

2.3.vi. Young children in schools.

The final quarter of the nineteenth century was significant for the legislation that established the elementary education system. The 1870 Elementary Education Act created school boards who were charged with setting up "sufficient accommodation in public elementary schools" (Great Britain, 1870, p.445). Children "not less than five years nor more than thirteen years" (Great Britain, 1870, p.471) were required to attend. School places were frequently not taken up, resulting in the passing of the Elementary Education Act 1876 (Great Britain, 1876) which made school attendance compulsory for children between the ages of five and ten. It was not until the passing of the Elementary Education Act, 1891 when funding was provided "for each child of the number of children over three and under fifteen years of age in average attendance" (Great Britain, 1891, p.272) that the opportunity for universal elementary education became possible. It is in the legislation for this last Act that provision for young children is mentioned, however, there is evidence of three year-old children attending schools much earlier – the 1854-5 report of Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) Matthew Arnold shows that 12.41% of the children on registers in the schools he visited were younger than five (House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1856, p.481). Arnold's general Report submitted for 1858 again provides evidence of the whereabouts of some young children as he notes the:

...tendency to allow the admission of children too young even for an infant school ... The mothers put, no doubt, a great deal of pressure upon infant managers in this respect ...Children under three years of age should certainly not be admitted to an infant school unless it is provided with a baby-room or crèche, such as is attached to infant schools in France (House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1859, p.150).

In 1904, almost fifty years after Arnold's first report, five women inspectors – amongst whom were Miss Bathurst, Miss Callis, and Miss Munday - were commissioned to examine the position of “children under five years in public elementary schools” (Board of Education, 1906). The Introductory Memorandum notes that, “It will be seen that there is complete unanimity that the children between the ages of three and five get practically no intellectual advantage from school instruction” (Board of Education, 1906, p.i) and continues by asking the question whether the children should be excluded. The answer proposed was that children from good homes should be, however:

...if the homes are poor and the mothers have to work, the answer is doubtful ... though fault may be found in the schools ... in the slums where the mothers have to leave their children to go to work, to attend school is better for the babies than to have to stay away (Board of Education, 1906, p.ii).

Miss Munday notes that in London the majority of the children started before the age of three (Board of Education, 1906, p.21). Miss Bathurst, having visited homes with the attendance officer, records childcare arrangements that included one baby left alone in a room with a fire; children locked out of their house until 6pm when the mother returned from work and a boy of ten who is left with pennies with which “he caters for the rest of the family” (Board of Education, 1906, p.63). Miss Callis confirms older children failing to attend school as they were kept at home to care for younger siblings and she reports, once again, that it was poverty that “compelled many mothers to send their children to school while they were out at work...” (Board of Education, 1906, p.107). The 1933 Hadow Report (Board of Education, 1933) gives detailed figures of three to five year olds attending the elementary schools in England and Wales; 24.2% were present in 1870-1, a figure that steadily increased to 43.1% in 1900-1 (p.29), suggesting that by the turn of the century, almost half of this specific group of young children were officially cared for within the education system.

2.3.vii. The nursery movement: development and decline.

It was during the end of the Nineteenth Century and the beginning of the Twentieth Century that the pioneering work of Rachel and Margaret McMillan occurred - addressing the needs of young, poor children in this country. From 1892 the sisters were based in Bradford and their work focused on improving the physical conditions as well as the educational opportunities for the children in the slum areas, encompassing care as well as education. The McMillans regarded children holistically and urged others to think of the “whole human being, not of the worker” (McMillan, 1911, p.8). Moving to London they continued to press for further reform, calling for and achieving the setting up of free school meals through the passing of the 1906 Provision of School Meals Act (England and Wales, 1906). Compulsory medical inspections were also introduced in 1907, which began to link the health and education of children in a way Margaret McMillan envisaged (McMillan, 1911, p.27). The first open-air nursery school was established by the McMillans in 1914 in Deptford. Working with parents to develop their knowledge of the care of their children and thus parents’ own education, was an important aspect of their practice – Margaret McMillan viewed the parents’ circumstances as living in a “kind of a prison” (Steedman, 1990, p. 94). She also envisaged the nursery as a centre “where the best that is known about treatment and training can be under their eyes and at their service” (Steedman, 1990, p.94).

Margaret McMillan was a founding member and President of the Nursery School Association (NSA) in 1923. After an inspirational start the nursery movement did not develop into universal provision. The 1918 Education Act (Great Britain, 1918) had given local authorities power to create nursery schools for children over two and under five. One aim of the NSA was to press for the implementation of this Act (Early Education, n.d.); however, the economic climate was such that few local authorities took up this power. Those that did were situated mainly in poor urban areas and consequently by March 1932 there were 55 nursery schools in England and Wales,

accommodating 4,520 children (Board of Education, 1933, p.46). Whilst the value of “nurture’ and education” (Board of Education, 1933, p.43) in the early years was acknowledged, there was not the political will to expand the provision and the available nursery places were used mainly for vulnerable children.

It was not until the Second World War when mothers were needed in the workforce to replace servicemen that the number of nursery places increased, however, they diminished rapidly at the end of the war when men returned needing jobs (Lewis, 2012; Lewis, 1984; Coulter, 1981). Families were advised, “The proper place for a child under two is at home with his mother” (Ministry of Health, 1945). Mothers were persuaded that they should be at home, being told that separation would be likely to cause long term damage to the emotional health of the child (Bowlby, 1951; Bowlby, 1958) which reflected the “new discipline of psychology” (Summerfield, 1995, p.312). As had happened after the First World War, there was again concern about the dip in population (Lewis, 1984, p.151) and the size of the family “did not increase to the recommended four children” as was hoped (Summerfield, 1995, p.312). Summerfield noted that this pressure was exerted upon women long before the publication of Bowlby’s (1951) research that was used to underpin the official policy (Gammage, 1999, p.2). Singer (1992), notes that the mantra, “Restoration of the family is restoration of the nation” (p.91) was propounded in Britain and the Netherlands, persuading women to resume their original place in the family. There were 1,600 nurseries in 1947, decreasing to 400 ten years later. Randall (1995) noted that 26 Councils or Boroughs had closed all of their nurseries (p. 334) thus working mothers had to make their own childcare arrangements, the majority of which were with unregistered childminders, as Jackson and Jackson (1979) identified.

2.4. PROVISION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN AFTER THE NURSERIES AND CHILD-MINDERS REGULATION ACT 1948.

It was forty years after the first Children Act (Great Britain, 1908) that childminders were specifically noted in legislation when the Nurseries and Child-Minders Regulation Act, 1948 (Great Britain, 1948) became law. Measures to regulate the care of children in other peoples' homes followed the deaths of several children killed in fires when left alone (Coulter, 1981, p.5; Jackson and Jackson, 1979, p.28). Childminders had continued to be viewed with suspicion (Bruner, 1980, p.93). It was reported at the Labour Women's Conference (1942), where there were calls for more accountable nursery provision that, "There was evidence from many sides that children brought to the nurseries, having been recently for months in the care of child-minders, were not in good condition" (Anon., 1942, p.2).

There were revisions to childminder regulations in the Health Services and Public Health Act, 1968 (Great Britain, 1968) making minor modifications to previous legislation for which local health authorities were responsible. The 1975 Children Act (Great Britain, 1975) reflects the change in responsibility from local health authorities to the social services departments established in 1974. Successive governments had failed to address the issue of appropriate care and education for preschool children; provision had been starved of funding by all parties (Lewis, 2012). Childminders were however, offered as an inexpensive solution, proposed in 1976 by David Owen at the 'Low Cost Day Care Provision for the Under Fives' Sunningdale Conference (Bruner, 1980, p.94), when he noted, "The theme is low cost. We did not meet to discuss the desirable; we want to grapple with the attainable" (Department of Health and Social Services/Department of Education and Science, 1976, p.1). Coulter (1981) argued that much was made at the conference of the "virtue, or potential virtue of this type of cheap provision" (p.6). Finch (1984) argued that minimal expenditure had been an objective of successive governments (p.4).

2.5. CHILDMINDER RESEARCH IN THE 1960S, 1970S AND 1980S.

There was little research that preceded the major study carried out by Jackson and Jackson in the 1970s which identified that local authorities (LA) were not fulfilling their duties of monitoring the registration of childminders. Despite statements from the Home Secretary, Henry Brooke, that LAs were able to protect children through the increased powers conferred on LAs through the Children Act 1958, reports of privation were published in newspapers. Henry Brooke stated it was not his responsibility to instruct LAs to take action, rather he thought it wise they should consider and exercise their authority (Anon., 1964, p.2). Using this situation negatively, MP Sir Cyril Osborne, after describing conditions some children experienced commented, "Once again you will admit this is an aspect of Commonwealth immigration" (Anon., 1964, p.2).

In 1967, when seeking an amendment to the 1948 Children Act, Joan Lester MP likened the situation to "baby-farming that took place in Victorian times" and called for facilities allowing childminders to benefit from LA guidance (Anon., 1967, p.2). Jackson and Jackson (1979) found that LA support for childminders was very patchy and concluded that the majority of LAs did not sustain childminders, regarding them "as something to be policed – not as a major part ... of the pre-school system" (p.42). Parents themselves generally did not know if the childminders they used were registered with the local authority nor saw it as important (Jackson and Jackson, 1979, p.52); they were concerned that there was someone to leave their child with whilst they worked as there were very few nursery places, most of which were not organised to cater for a mother working long hours. Jackson and Jackson (1979) reported an interview with a Suffolk social worker, who asked if women making "a metal pen out of movable cattle fences ... [with] ... a few toys", transferring this arrangement to a barn when wet, was childminding (p.181).

Jackson and Jackson (1979) found that there were huge discrepancies in statistical data and concluded that the most vulnerable children and families were unaccounted for. Their findings mirrored Bathurst's report written in 1906 for the Board of Education, nearly three-quarters of a century earlier. Jackson and Jackson (1979) reported children left alone at home; a six year old caring for her two younger brothers; children left to fend for themselves and girls kept at home from school to look after young siblings (Jackson and Jackson, 1979, p.91). They also concluded that of all the childminders studied, about half of the minded children suffered "serious neglect and harsh treatment, if not actual cruelty" (Jackson and Jackson, 1979, p.95).

The majority of research in England in the 1960s and 1970s was undertaken in urban areas and reported the unacceptable conditions minded children were experiencing. Jackson (1974) reporting on research carried out with 500 registered childminders in Hounslow concluded that half were "definitely substandard in all respects" (p.3), giving an example of one minder who had 16 children in her average-sized sitting room. Jackson (1974) highlighted the "extreme language retardation of children minded since infancy" (p.6) identifying the plight of an eighteen month old child who had started at nursery unable to sit up and "completely unresponsive to human contact" (p.6). Jackson (1974) stated that training was the only solution to the situation and changing childminders' perception of their jobs from that of an additional task worked alongside their housework to that of a skilled occupation for which training is required. This however, was problematic.

Research amongst minded West Indian children revealed the awful conditions children endured noting that, "In extreme cases children may be tied to table legs, or put into rows of carrycots in disused garages" (National Elfreda Rathbone Society, 1974, p.2). A checklist was used by the researchers to evaluate the provision offered to children and was also offered as a resource to help LAs identify areas in which childminders could be supported, both through grants and training or advice. There were two

scales, 'Physical Conditions' and 'Quality of Care'. Whilst it was acknowledged that all aspects were crucial for a child and the ability to create a warm and affectionate relationship was a fundamental quality childminders needed, this alone did not ensure children developed good language skills nor were prepared adequately for school (National Elfreda Rathbone Society, 1974, p.24). Researchers noted it was common for childminders to leave the children alone in the house (National Elfreda Rathbone Society, 1974, p.26). The research showed that the majority of childminders who were registered did not achieve a score on five of the twelve Quality of Care criteria which included taking children out at least once a week; reasoning with children rather than shouting or slapping; talking to children; playing with children; engaging in creative play; or preparing children for school. The researchers involved in this project developed a training programme to address the knowledge and understanding of a small group of these childminders. The course was not successful and the evaluation acknowledged that interest had been shown by some childminders but with no follow-up help or support the training had no impact. It was found that at least four of the childminders were illiterate or semi-illiterate and, reflecting on the presentation of the tutors, it was noted that the participants would have seen "learning in authoritarian terms" (National Elfreda Rathbone Society, 1974, p.20), which subsequently restricted the self-reflection needed for development. The authors emphasised childminders needed to develop affirmative, mutual support to give them strength to maintain new perspectives. Working in isolation, the cultural beliefs that they may be reconsidering and rejecting would still be held by "husbands, parents and neighbours" (National Elfreda Rathbone Society, 1974, p.20). These two points are still particularly important, nearly forty years later, especially for childminders living in rural areas where cultural diversity is limited and childminders may not have had the experiences of those living in multi-cultural communities. The identified need for quality interaction with children in order to develop language skills is relevant today and an aspect of training some childminders highlighted in the empirical study.

An investigation into the practices in Minority Ethnic Communities once again found children under five left alone during the day whilst their mothers worked full time; being cared for in overcrowded conditions and lacking play or stimulation or who were cared for by childminders who could not speak their language or understand their culture (Community Relations Commission, 1975, p.17). Two mothers were reported as using foster-mothers because they had been unable to find alternative childcare; this echoes the arrangements made by some mothers one hundred years earlier. The conditions reported by parents resorting to this facility also reflected extreme neglect of earlier years. A mother said, "After five months they had lost so much weight you could see the bones in their chests and they had raw bottoms" (Evans, 1970). The newspaper report stated that the childcare needs of parents working long hours necessitated foster arrangements. The lack of understanding of unsocial hours worked by some parents still persists; in my empirical study childminders explained the role they play in supporting such families.

Mayall and Petrie (1977) sought to examine quality from three perspectives, those of the childminder, the mother and the child (p. 19), using interviews and observations to gather data from non-immigrant, registered childminders, chosen in order to avoid being seen as a discriminatory study. Whilst initially there had been other criteria for selecting participants, the lack of information kept by LAs meant eventually that convenience sampling had to be used. Mayall and Petrie (1977) noted how accessing participants was time consuming (p.21), a problem encountered within my own empirical study. As well as highlighting the dearth of resources in the majority of homes, Mayall and Petrie (1977) found a huge discrepancy between the interaction of the children with the minder and their own mother, noting that apart from physical care, there were few demands made of the minders from the children; the lack of "warm, positive behaviour towards the child" (p.45) was recorded in many cases, neither touching or speaking to children throughout the hour long interview. The minders' accommodation was limited and so restricted facilities offered – examples were given of children

confined to a single room in which they ate, slept and played; in one instance a minder had seven children in such conditions (Mayall and Petrie, 1977, p.37). Children were seldom taken out from the setting or had opportunity for outdoor play (Mayall and Petrie, 1977, p.37). Amongst the recommendations Mayall and Petrie (1977) made were that no single childminder should be able to care for more than three children under five, including her own; LAs should become the employers of childminders; and there should be grants to support childminders in the provision of food, heating, creating safe conditions and taking children out. The recommendation limiting the number of children cared for has since been addressed and improved, however it is one of the reversals being suggested by Truss (2012b).

Owen and Fauth (2010) note that the overall impression conveyed by research during this period was that, "Childminding offered a low level of quality for children from disadvantaged families and that childminders were largely unregulated and unqualified ... This is a perception that has persisted over time" (p.2). Researchers offered suggestions for the further development of childminders but the deficiency found in the provision appears to have overshadowed the astute proposals contained within the reports (Bruner, 1980; Jackson and Jackson, 1979; Mayall and Petrie, 1977; Community Relations Commission 1975; National Elfreda Rathbone Society, 1974). Jackson (1974) considered that childminders' own perception of their role needed to be changed to enable childminders to recognise theirs was skilled work that required training (p.7), however, having initiated a course, decided this approach had to be carefully planned to support childminders to engage in personal development rather than being instructed to change their practice (National Elfreda Rathbone Society, 1974, p.19). The need for mutually supportive childminder groups was highlighted by Bruner (1980), Jackson and Jackson (1979) and the Community Relations Commission, (1975), with suggestions of more experienced minders facilitating members' development. The recommendation for a more professional service was called for with suggestions that childminders were employed by local authorities (National Elfreda Rathbone Society, 1974, p.19). Mayall and

Petrie (1977) agreed and extended this by requiring local authorities to take a more prominent role in supporting childminders with resources (p.59). Mayall and Petrie (1977) had a vision of a centre with childminders attached; Jackson and Jackson (1979) called for a similar centre which would combine integrated care that consequently impacted upon families and young children (p.225). In detailed recommendations, Jackson and Jackson (1979) proposed a combination of:

...care and education ... an acknowledgement of new professionals with a different title for childminders to rid the profession of the bad overtones... an 'Open College' [to support childminders' learning and development] ... a new sensitivity and an asserted priority for children under five ... a 'Minister for Children' ... and a social vision, expressed in policy ... [that] seeks to plan for its best present and better future (p.255).

Proposing a 'Charter for Childminders' Jackson and Jackson (1979, p.241) noted that combining the concepts of 'care' and 'education' was essential to raising the status of this group of practitioners.

The lack of government recognition of the needs of working mothers or of the importance of the early years to a child's development and future life chances prompted individuals within the community to take action and tackle the issues of childcare and education. In 1961, Belle Tutæv wrote to the Guardian (Soward, 1962, p.8), explaining how she had formed a group with like-minded mothers and created a playgroup for their children. Within a year the Pre-school Playgroups Association was founded, now known as the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA), the aims of which were to support members who ran groups, raise awareness of the importance of preschool provision and lobby for the withdrawal of Circular 8/60 (Ministry of Education, 1960), which had restricted LAs in increasing nursery provision (Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2010).

Reacting to the bad publicity childminders were receiving and building on the informal networks childminders were developing amongst themselves (Owen, 2007, pp.32-33) the National Childminding Association (NCMA) was

established in 1977, “To improve the general standard of care offered and to promote better support services for childminders” (National Childminding Association [NCMA], 2010). The ethical principles that underpin the organisation include a commitment from member childminders to, “Strive to provide a high quality childcare service that aims to support each child to achieve her or his potential” (NCMA, 2012). Working with The Open University in 1986, the NCMA produced the first national training materials for childminders followed by the Childminding Quality Charter (1989), a forerunner to the present quality assurance scheme, Children Come First, which is now used by many LAs to develop quality and as a requirement for network participation.

Bruner (1980) suggests that studies have purposefully “*not* been neutral” (p.92) in an attempt to raise awareness of the potential long-term damage to minded children. Raven (1981) however, rejected this proposition, citing insufficient evidence to warrant the concern and the relatively small scale studies, suggesting that childminding had only recently become a contentious topic (p.103). Whilst the term ‘childminding’ was a recent addition to the English vocabulary, I would assert the experiences young children were subjected to during away from home care had long been contentious. Misrahi (1997, p.78) agreed with the overall criticism of childminders in research and believed the contradictory perception of the results held by Raven (1981) to be incorrect. Moss and Melhuish (1991) contend that Raven (1981) was highlighting the differences the socio-demographic representation of the minded children rather than being critical of childminders. In a three year project in Oxfordshire the physical conditions of the children were recorded as being superior to that reported in earlier studies, but researchers noted the relationships between minders and children did not appear to be “close and satisfying” (Bryant, 1980, p.125), a conclusion drawn after observing quiet and detached children, a quarter of whom were lacking in verbal skills. Reflecting on the study, Bryant (1980) notes that Bruner (1980) had taken this further by suggesting that, “On the basis of this study...the present practice of childminding will increase

maladjustment in the generation exposed to it” (Bruner, 1980, p.127). Bryant (1980) opined that a secure generalisation could not be made from this small study (p.127). The description of the children resonates with the child observed and documented by Robertson in 1952 when ‘A Two Year Old Goes to Hospital’ identified stages of distress (The Open University, 2004b).

The year 1989 was important inasmuch that internationally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 1989) was ratified. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child was approved by the League of Nations and specified the duties of adults towards children and the human rights to which every child should be entitled. In 1991 the British government ratified this Treaty, providing a means by which policy and practice could be scrutinised thus ensuring the rights and needs of children and young people are considered and addressed (Lansdown, 1996, p.10). Nationally, the Children Act 1989 (Great Britain, 1989) was passed which became the basis of registration and inspection until the responsibility passed from individual LAs to Ofsted in 2001.

2.6. CHILDMINDING FROM THE 1990S TO THE PRESENT DAY.

Fauth et al. (2011) comment upon the lack of recent research on childminder practice and provision (p.14); my searches confirmed this. Hennessy, Martin, Moss and Melhuish (1992) reviewing earlier studies warned that the time during which research is undertaken has a great bearing on the results and consequently the social, economic and political agendas should be considered as these influence the attitude towards care of children (p.6). Awareness of historical methodology was noted at the beginning of this chapter. Additionally, Morgan (1996) states childcare is difficult to examine because of the differing factors between settings and types of provision (p.23) with which I would agree – differences I have observed between LA

provision, for example, has been a catalyst for this study. However this is not a reason to avoid research, rather one to instigate investigation in order to contribute to the body of knowledge.

Positionality and the possibility of researcher bias is an ongoing debate within the literature (Denscombe, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Bryman, 2004; Haberman, 2000; Becker, 1967). Hennessy et al. (1992) who reviewed research prior to 1992, suggest that the positionality of the researchers compiling these reports could have influenced the results, noting that they were generally not from the same class or culture as those working in or using the service. Hennessey et al. (1992) asserted that consequently, researchers might have had a different emphasis to that of parents, or not understood some of the practitioners' behaviour (p.46). I would argue that whilst the researchers might have been white and middle class, their previous life experiences may have been far removed from the assumptions made by Hennessy et al. (1992). I would also assert that class and culture does not preclude researchers striving towards meeting the principles of the UNCRC, that of seeking to ensure all children are treated respectfully and offered the best opportunities to reach their potential. I now turn to the themes emerging from recent research.

2.6.i. The benefit of childcare.

The EYFS (DCSF, 2008a) highlighted the rich environments provided by many parents, stating that providers will be able to replicate these experiences by meeting the Standards (p.09), reinforcing the notion that the qualities of a good home environment is an aspiration of away from home childcare. A case against the value of young children experiencing away from home care was an issue put forward in the literature. Poor quality settings offer provision that only the children from homes lacking in appropriate stimulation might benefit from; for children experiencing a good

quality home environment, childcare would be regressive step (Morgan, 1996; Moss and Melhuish, 1991).

Recent government initiatives set up to address childhood inequality have focused on providing additional hours of free childcare for two year olds (TSO., 2011, p.43) in ten regions of England (Woodcock, 2012). Examining DfE (2011a) data of Key Stage 4 achievement for these LAs, seven returned lower than the average result of 59% of pupils achieving 5 or more A to C grades, including English and mathematics. The lowest score was 9.5% lower than the national average, suggesting that practitioners within settings in the LA are likely to have left school with lower qualifications than the average. Additionally, settings in this LA have lower than average 'good' and 'outstanding' judgements (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills [Ofsted], 2011), the standard that was considered necessary for children to receive the benefit of care away from home (Smith et al., 2009, p.86). Nutbrown (2012b) found that students with lower attainment are likely to be guided towards childcare as a career; in the LA with lower than average achievement, the quality of the carers could be well below that required to make a positive impact upon children's development. Students are likely to have been placed in 'satisfactory' or 'inadequate' settings, potentially further limiting the acquisition of their own knowledge and understanding of good practice (Mathers et al., 2012, p.42). Morgan (1996) and Moss and Melhuish (1991) therefore raise a pertinent issue; measures taken to address the inequality that some children experience cannot be solved by younger children spending more time in day care which potentially offers less opportunity for positive development. I have visited many settings and I have been concerned with the poor environments in which some young children spend their days; I therefore concur with Morgan (1996) and Leach (2009). Having worked within such an LA and taught Further and Higher Education students I have observed the difficulties some practitioners have with basic skills, and consequently, they are not able to offer the level of quality care needed, particularly to support young children's language development (Nutbrown, 2012a, p.15).

2.6.ii. Reasons for taking up childminding.

Morgan (1996) asserts childminding was an occupation frequently taken up by women who “were not interested in working with children but wanted to earn money in a way that would not interfere with...other commitments...were not well enough to go out to work...had long-term disability...had been advised as an anti-dote to depression” (p.35). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) (2001) found the main reason was that childminders wanted to be at home with their children and contribute to the family income, results reflected in a recent study (Barker, 2012). Fauth et al. (2011) showed 64.1% of respondents had wanted to work with children, contrasting with the earlier findings reported by Morgan (1996). A higher figure, 75.1% had indicated that staying at home with their own children had been a factor in their choice of employment, reflecting the JRF (2001) research results. The perception that childminders were not of an equal status with other childcare providers has persisted (Owen and Fauth, 2010), though Owen (2005) suggests this has begun to be addressed through approved networks. These are assessed by an independent assessor, confirming specific initial criteria are met; ongoing reapproval ensures this standard continues.

Discussing the perception of childminders held by different classes of parents in two areas of London, Vincent, Braun and Ball (2007) claim their research suggests working class mothers view childminders with suspicion, fearing inherent dangers in leaving children in the homes of other people; middle class mothers considered the smaller “intimate, care spaces” (p.9) more suitable for very young children as opposed to nursery provision. Jones and Osgood (2007), challenging the notion of adequacy, assert that previous research and media scare stories created a ‘stereotypical’ childminder; they suggest the introduction of national frameworks undermines the competence of working class mothers and is an attempt to impose white middle-class values and surveillance in the guise of professionalising the role.

2.6.iii. Childminders' qualifications and training.

Misrahi (1997) believed that inspectors held the opinion that for childminders, being mothers provided the necessary knowledge, understanding and qualifications to care for other people's children (p.80). JRF (2001) researchers came to a similar conclusion regarding recognised training and qualifications: that the childminding workforce was made up of women with low levels of education who had received scant training, if any, and did not feel further training or qualifications were necessary. Ferri (1992) surmised this was as a result of childminding being viewed as 'an essentially *private* activity, involving minimal state expenditure' (p.21).

A national childcare provider survey (Brind et al., 2011), noting that childminders are not required to hold any qualifications reported that approximately 22% of the 900 childminders questioned, held no specific childcare qualification (p.108). Over half held at least a Level 3 qualification; 3% held at least a Level 6. These findings are similar to the NCMA (2011) survey conducted with 1000 childminders but higher than Barker (2012), who found 39% held a Level 3 qualification within one LA. The NCMA study differs insomuch childminders were asked about non-childcare qualifications. I believe this to be an important aspect of knowledge and experience childminders bring to their role. Neglecting to include this data in the national survey will have distorted the perception of the educational level of many childminders. The comparison between childcare staff and childminders suggested a deficit, "While only eight per cent of childcare staff did not have any relevant qualification, around two in ten childminders (22 per cent) did not" (Brind et al., 2011, p.108). I firmly believe practitioners should hold robust childcare qualifications, however, I have seen there can be enormous differences between a young practitioner who has, for example, one of the less "full and relevant" (Nutbrown, 2012a, p.17) qualifications and a mature, graduate childminder. Fauth et al. (2011) report 14.1% of their 575

respondents hold a Level 4 or 5 qualification; the NCMA (2011) records 9% of participants have a Degree.

Research shows initial training received by childminders is inconsistent, varying from less than four hours to over eight hours (Brind et al., 2011, p.158). Discussing the take-up of training, the authors suggested that more experienced childminders would typically have fewer training requirements than newer childminders (Brind et al., 2011, p.159). I would disagree with this statement and my research findings substantiate my position. NCMA (2011, p. 39) research showed that 97% of childminders who had achieved an 'outstanding' judgement had attended training during the previous twelve months, further challenging the inference that training needs decrease with experience. EPPE research supports this view; in their study Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden and Bell (2002) chose childminders with at least a Level 3 qualification, reporting that almost all of the participants held positive views about continuing professional development (p.103).

2.6.iv. Quality practice and provision.

In 2004 the government proposed that all people working for and with children and young people were to be responsible for ensuring the five 'Every Child Matters' outcomes were at the forefront of their work (DfES, 2004). The role childminders had to play within this vision was noted by Hobart and Frankel (2003) who stated it was, "An exciting time for childminders...skills and experience are finally being acknowledged" (p.217) which contrasts with researchers' findings of expertise within the workforce (Joseph Rowntree Foundation [JRF], 2001; Morgan 1996). However, Penn (2007) suggests that whilst the Children Act 2004 was a move towards creating a structured early years service, there needed to be tighter regulation to ensure quality amongst the diverse providers (p.198).

Sure Start, launched in 1998 to reduce child poverty, was the vehicle through which funding was made available for work with young children and families in the most deprived areas. A Sure Start (2004) research project stated that there was at least one formal childminder network in 91% of the 139 LAs that had provided data and there was an average of 2.4 formal networks. Recognising the role childminder networks had to play in raising standards, Owen (2005) reported that childminders thought the training opportunities were the most important aspect and suggested this facilitates the development of quality provision (p.5). Owen (2005) recommended that there should be more research carried out to gain a greater understanding of home-based quality care with the purpose of learning how it could be supported (p.9). The impact of the NCMA was reported by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002, p.112).

Comparing quality of care offered by childminder, nursery, nanny and family member, at 10 and 18 months, Leach, Barnes, Malmberg, Sylva, Stein, and the FCCC Team (2008) found that despite a general assumption that nurseries have better qualified staff it was in the lesser quality physical environment of a childminder's home that children encountered a higher level of purposeful adult-child activities, which are essential for language development and reasoning skills (p.199). The findings echo the research of Tizzard and Hughes (1984) who found working class children had a richer communication environment with their mothers at home than did children in nursery. Shared experiences and a close relationship facilitated deep, sustained interaction. The EPPE research identified 'sustained shared thinking', defined as "when two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, extend a narrative, etc." (Sylva et al., 2004,p.06), as an element of quality.

Childminders interpreted their role as that similar to mothering and perceived care as being a substitute parent (Mooney and Statham, 2003, p.119). Leach et al.'s (2008) research found that childminders offering love and understanding reflected mothers' perception of quality and, having

established home-based as better than nursery day care, concluded registered childminders' care "can be considered as good as (or in some cases better than) care by a relative" (p.203). Research identified the importance placed on the loving relationship between practitioner and child as well as the caregiver being reliable and trustworthy (Mathers et al., 2012; Leach, 2009). The importance mothers place on this relationship, termed "professional love" (Page, 2011) or "images of mothering" (Vincent and Ball, 2001) are regarded as elements of quality in their chosen caregiver (Mathers et al., 2012; Leach, 2009). Misrahi (1997) considered it to be the most important.

Acknowledging the difficulty in defining the concept of quality, Leach (2009) asserts provision in the United Kingdom is less consistent to that of continental Europe (pp.16-17). Crucially, at a time when proposals for increasing the number of children a childminder can care for are being made, the relationship between low child-adult ratio to higher care quality has been established (Leach, 2009, p.194; Harrison, 2008, p.21).

Research by Fauth et al. (2011) aimed to understand more about practice, childminders' understanding of how children learn and how learning is supported. Fauth et al. (2011) reported that childminders who were reflective practitioners and were willing to improve their practice offered consistent high-quality childcare (p.10). Childminders were asked about, and observations made of their practice to identify aspects they considered inherent to quality care. Fauth et al. (2011) reported the following:

- Sustaining caring, consistent one-to-one relationships with children
- Tailoring provision to children's interests and needs
- Maintaining flexibility to be responsive to children's interests and needs
- Embedding learning in play
- Extending child-directed play
- Using community resources
- Being willing to reflect and change practice.

Ultimately, the key to effective childminding practice was childminders' ability to make learning part of a caring, close relationship (p.11).

However, Fauth et al. (2011, p.73) reported childminders who did not interact with minded children, reflecting earlier research (Bruner, 1980).

2.7. SUMMARY.

This chapter has presented a timeline of the history of the transformation of the role of the childminder brought about through social, economic and cultural change (Appendix 2.1). An overview of provision made for young children has been set out.

Childminder research has frequently uncovered poor provision and a deficit portrayal of practice resulting in a stereotypical view of a poorly educated practitioner with questionable motives for taking on the care of other people's children. Recent research (Barker, 2012; Fauth et al., 2011; NCMA, 2011; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002,) has shown that despite the drawbacks of the job, childminders generally gain satisfaction from the role even though the image held of childminders and the perception that the work they do is regarded as inferior to that of other childcare providers. Childminder networks are seen as a way of raising the standard of practice (Owen, 2007, Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002,) and training identified as a way of developing professional recognition (Owen and Fauth, 2010).

This study seeks to examine the ways in which childminders have not only adapted to their position within the early years workforce but have also developed a high standard of practice and provision. The methodology of this study is explained in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology.

“I do research so as to know what I do not yet know and to communicate and proclaim what I discover”

(Friere, 1998, p.35).

3.1. INTRODUCTION.

In this chapter I will present the methodology that underpins my research study and explain the rationale for decisions taken. I will begin by clarifying my positionality before setting out the conceptual framework, followed by a discussion of the research design. The ethical considerations will then be presented, followed by a discussion of the methods chosen and the strategies used to analyse the data. I will consider the reliability and validity of the study and conclude the chapter by discussing the limitations of the research methodology.

“Methodology refers to the principles and values, philosophies and ideologies that underpin the entire research process” (Roberts-Holmes, 2005, p.xiv). The ideals of honesty, principled interaction, reliability and transparency, (Roberts-Holmes, 2005) echo my personal beliefs and values and have influenced the decisions made during the research process; this chapter will set out and justify those decisions.

In his examination of the role and value of methodology Hammersley (2011) suggests methodology might be perceived as being relevant only “to novice researchers” (p.18). This would imply that experienced researchers are able to relax or even abandon beliefs and values during the research process, an assertion with which I would strongly disagree. Discussing scenarios which, as a student researcher I had not considered, Sikes (2006) presents possible

dilemmas faced by career researchers when beliefs and values are suspended for a range of reasons. Sikes (2006) makes a link between holding firm with one's beliefs and subsequent career trajectory; I can relate to this predicament. However, as a novice researcher, I believe methodology offers a critical lens through which to consider the research process and provides a framework. Research is not straightforward, linear or problem-free as completed research reports might suggest (Hammersley, 2011, p.33; Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCullough and Sikes, 2005); decisions have to be taken and disappointments addressed during all stages of a study. The ideals of honesty, principled interaction, reliability and transparency, in Roberts-Holmes' (2005) definition of methodology echo my personal beliefs and my work ethic and have thus shaped decisions taken in this study. I will now consider the influences that have shaped my positionality.

3.2. POSITIONALITY.

I hold a deep feeling for the subject being studied. It is acknowledged that research cannot be unbiased and value-free (Becker, 1967) therefore it is the responsibility of the researcher to identify the position held (Wellington, 2000, p.41). It is by examining and explaining my beliefs, values and ideologies that the impact upon this empirical research can be made explicit. Social research is persuasive, purposive, positional, and consequently political (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012, p.4). I embarked upon this thesis with that intent. Childminders provide an essential service for families, however, literature has shown that research has tended to portray practitioners in a very poor light (Owen, 2007; JRF, 2001). My personal experience of childminders, as carers of my son, practitioners, colleagues and students has been of a dedicated group within the early years workforce; this has not been evident in research findings. This empirical study sets out to present a realistic representation of the work childminders do in order to persuade the reader that there is a misconception and underestimation of the role. Ideally

I would want this research to bring about change. In the current climate of government cut-backs and with the proposals suggested, there are factors that will limit the possibility. My research is very strongly positioned; making a positive difference to children and adults with whom I have worked has always been my objective. Finally, I seek to influence change (Pring, 2000, p.20) and thus acknowledge the political intentions of my work. Examining and articulating the theoretical assumptions underpinning the decisions made throughout the research process proved to be part of my learning journey.

The perspective I adopt views “society as a structure of inequality” (Jones, Bradbury and Le Boutillier, 2011, p.10). Times in which I grew up changed from a truly patriarchal construct to a fairer arrangement, though I recognise that the lens through which I observe social order is privileged inasmuch as I am white, professional and advantaged in comparison to many in this country and infinitely more worldwide. In the first years of my life I experienced “traditional ways of living” (Jones et al., 2011. p.196); from a working class family brought up on a council housing estate, I was part of a secure and loving family. My mother worked as an auxiliary nurse from the time I was six. In the last year of primary school I passed the 11+ examination which was the selection process that determined many people’s life chances. My secondary education was in a ‘High’ school which automatically enabled me to take GCE examinations at Ordinary and Advanced level, thereafter entering Higher education at the age of 18; the majority of my primary school peers spent their secondary years in a Secondary Modern school, leaving at 15 years of age and unable to access the examinations needed for Further or Higher education. Happenstance meant that I had a very different life trajectory to my siblings and most of my early childhood friends; at the time I was not aware of the impact of the disparity of opportunities that would be available to us. Teaching, my career choice, was unusual inasmuch that the salary paid to women was equal to that of men. However, I recall that my salary was ineligible in mortgage negotiations because I was a woman – there was a “life-script” (Jones et al.,

2011, p.196) considered acceptable. This was my then view of the world, the boundaries limited by personal experience, the radio and newspapers; my family had no television until I was in my mid-teens, during the early years of our marriage we had none and the internet and the World Wide Web had not been invented. Questioning the tolerance of women to the situation in which they found themselves, Jones et al. (2011) suggest that it was through controlled socialisation, by overt and covert means (p.15). My ontological position was, at that time, reflecting Weber's typologies of action and power – "I do this because I always have done" following "the rules" because "this is what people have always done" (Jones et al., 2011, p.86). Looking back, I held a blinkered and unquestioning view of the world, greatly influenced by the fact that I had a secure and comfortable life that was far more privileged and prosperous than that of my parents who had lived through two World Wars. I feel saddened that I took emerging opportunities for granted, especially when I consider that just a generation earlier my parents had to leave school at fourteen with no prospects of Higher education; universal suffrage was just becoming established; and they had created our secure family unit when there was no National Health Service or Welfare support. I will now consider how my thinking has developed.

New technologies precipitated a 'time of questioning' (Schostak, 1991) and the emergence of, amongst other things, feminism to challenge the inequity that perpetuated the social structure in the 1960s and 1970s. Feminist theory is evolving (Lather, 2006; hooks, 2005; Green and Griffiths, 2000; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Lather, 1991) the epistemology being woven from differing strands of "richness and thought" (Crotty, 2003, p.170) into a more expansive paradigm. Chafetz (2004) argues that inherent to all feminist theory should be a consensus of working to eliminate the unjust gender inequality, the consequence of females being regarded as of lesser value than males both socially and culturally.

Green and Griffiths (2000) assert that feminism is "more a perspective, a lens, a handle on the world and its ideas, a way of acting and speaking"

(p.77). This suggests a dynamic position, one that evolves with new experiences and understanding and echoes my learning journey. The focus of my study is a group of practitioners whose work is often unrecognised and frequently undervalued, reflecting Lather's (1991) assertion that gender is central to the structure of society (p.71), one I believe, which has failed to appreciate the role of childminders. hooks (2005, p.61) emphasised the blinkered views of feminists whose emancipation depended upon the servitude of other women; an observation that resonates with my research. The outcome of increased opportunities for some women to develop careers has resulted in demands being placed upon other women in order to achieve individual freedom, creating an unjust system that challenges feminists to consider the position of carers (Page, 2011; Tronto, 2002; Noddings, 2001). The "social feminism" Griffiths (1998) endorses, and which underpins my work, is "a passion for justice for human beings, all of them, whatever their needs" (p.81).

This underlying premise links to critical theory, which looks beyond a situation to seek emancipation and redress inequality (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2000). Emanating from the work of Marx who argued that the power and wealth held by a few is sustained by the domination and labour of the majority (Jones et al., 2011; Giroux, 1983) critical theorists examined the structures that perpetuate oppression. The education system is such a vehicle (Apple, 2006; Friere, 1998; Carr and Harnett, 1996; Apple, 1979; Bordieu and Passeron, 1970/1977; Bernstein, 1975; Friere, 1968/1972). By adopting a critical perspective towards research I am seeking not only to understand the position of the childminder participants but to highlight the inequalities this group of workers face.

The epistemological stance I have adopted in my research emanates from my reading and understanding of the literature of social theory (Jones et al., 2011; Blake, Smeyers, Smith and Standish, 2000; Green and Griffiths, 2000;

Griffiths, 1998); my awareness has grown enormously and has been lived since the early 1970s but with no underpinning theoretical knowledge.

I have discussed the underpinning rationale, recognising that research cannot be value-free; indeed, the childminding interviewees were people with whom I engaged, not simply “respondents to research instruments” (Bryman, 2004, p.23). I will now turn to examining the approach taken.

3.3. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.

The research design, the “framework for the generation of evidence” (Bryman, 2004, p.27) provides the structure that will produce data to answer the research questions. Punch (2005) noting research questions shape the study, suggests five functions they fulfil; organising and delimiting the project, providing a focus, a framework for writing and an indication of the data needed. Robson (1993) emphasises the importance of ensuring consistency between the conceptual structure and the research questions (p.153). I will now explain concepts that shape the research and the research questions located within this framework, following Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (2006) who note the importance of defining key concepts and indicators.

3.3.i. Childminders.

The aim of the research is to identify factors that have enabled childminders living in rural areas to develop quality provision. The generic Ofsted definition of a childminder (Ofsted, 2011), is the classification used in this thesis. There are two types of Ofsted Registration; the Early Years Register, enabling childminders to provide care for children between birth to five and the Childcare Register, permitting the care of children between five and eight and from eight to eighteen. Childminders can apply for registration on one or

both Registers. The focus of this research has been childminders registered on the Early Years Register as practice is governed by the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

3.3.ii. Rural English local authorities.

'Rural' can be regarded as a "social construct" (Hobson, 2007; Little and Austin, 1996); for this study, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) categorisations were followed. Rural definition was first coordinated in 2004 adopting a settlement-based approach, to facilitate "the analysis and reporting of statistical information" (DEFRA, 2004). However, DEFRA (2004) note, "Indices of Deprivation, levels of service provision and so on" also needed to be considered. In 2005 DEFRA introduced the 'Rural/Urban Local Authority (LA) Classification (England)' because many statistics are available only at LA level, consequently a rural definition of LAs was necessary. Six urban/rural classifications were introduced, the significant category for this research being, "Rural-80, districts with at least 80 per cent of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns" (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2005).

In April 2009, reorganisation created nine new unitary authorities; the number of LA Districts were reduced from 354 to 326 (DEFRA, 2009, p.5) which affected the status of 5 of the then Local Education Authorities being tracked from September 2008 to August 2009. The 5 authorities were in the Rural-80 category for at least 5 months, consequently, for the purpose of this investigation, were included in the data set. It is recognised that rural classification used can be considered 'arbitrary'; there is "no logical point at which 'urban' changes to 'rural' and the character of rural varies between places and through time" (Hodges and Monk, 2004, p.264). The explanation of the rural definition used in this data analysis has been offered to counteract the claim made by Hodges and Monk (2004) that different

definitions have been used in research without clarification of the categorisation.

3.3.iii. Indicators of quality.

A definition of quality provision is less straightforward to categorise. The quest for quality “is coloured by the history, circumstances and context - economic, social and cultural - in which the society exists” (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2005). To develop an understanding of the contemporary concept of quality and to create a consensus presented in documentation, I carried out an analysis of current early years publications. I examined documents to identify common indicators of quality (DCSF, 2008c; Ofsted, 2008; Harms, Cryer and Clifford, 2007; Sylva et al., 2004). I found that the Groups of Standards in ‘Guidance to the Standards for the Award of Early Years Professional Status’ (Children’s Workforce Development Council [CWDC], 2008) provided convenient categories into which elements could be placed.

Ofsted state a function of the regulatory inspection process is to help practitioners improve the quality of their setting (Ofsted, 2009, p.9); for the purpose of this study, an ‘outstanding’ outcome from an Ofsted inspection was the identifier adopted to make comparisons between LAs as well as within each LA to identify individual childminders.

3.3.iv. Research questions.

The research questions are located within the concepts identified. The overarching questions this thesis seeks to answer are:

What factors enable childminders working in rural English LAs to achieve 'outstanding' practice?

How can 'outstanding' childminders contribute to the development of childminding practice and provision?

To investigate these questions in greater detail the following were considered:

1. Does the support for childminders differ between LAs and if so, how?
2. Is there a link between the support offered by LAs and the number of childminders achieving 'outstanding' practice?
3. What are the common elements of effective childminder practice identified in Ofsted reports of childminders working in rural LAs?
4. How do childminders in rural LAs characterise quality provision?
5. What sources of support do rural childminders feel have impacted upon their practice leading to an 'outstanding' Ofsted judgement?
6. Do 'outstanding' childminders use their knowledge, understanding and expertise to support and influence other childminders, and in what ways?

3.4. THE RESEARCH DESIGN.

3.4.i. Research study overview.

To clarify the discussion that follows I will present a brief overview of the research study. Having identified 19 rural LAs, weekly records of the Ofsted reports published for relevant LAs from September 1st 2008 until August 31st 2009 were compiled. These data established the rural LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' childminders. A document analysis was carried out on the 'outstanding' Ofsted reports for this LA. I had originally planned to conduct interviews with childminders solely from this LA, however I could find only six participants and felt this was too small a sample. Consequently, I planned to conduct telephone interviews with three childminders from each rural LA. However, one LA had no childminders meeting the criteria; one LA had two, both of whom I interviewed and in a third LA I was unable to find three participants and so interviews were conducted with two. A total of 55 telephone interviews were conducted between October 2011 and May 2012. I carried out a document analysis of the Ofsted reports of all telephone interviewees. Additionally, in the summer of 2009 a questionnaire was sent to 152 English LAs with a follow up request for information in the autumn; 45 replies were received and analysed. I piloted the telephone interview schedule with three childminders before conducting the interviews with the research participants. Similarly, I sent questionnaires to three LA officers before finalising the format. Feedback enabled me to make adaptations to the questionnaire, amend the interview schedule and confirmed childminders preferred that a questionnaire was not sent prior to the telephone interview.

3.4.ii. Mixed method design.

A mixed method survey was identified as an appropriate strategy to address the research questions because I wanted to examine in detail the practice

and provision of a specific category of childminder. Wanting more than a “fact-finding mission” (Wellington, 1996, p.52) and following Denscombe (2007) I sought to achieve greater depth and more detail from this study than a single method might produce. The advantages of a mixed method approach are that a range of data collection approaches and methods offer an array of perspectives; triangulation of findings is possible (Denscombe, 2007); qualitative methods create “thick description” offering a richness that can be incorporated into the final report (Punch, 2005). I have combined quantitative and qualitative methods and approaches, bringing together the strengths and advantages of both. Punch (2005) suggests that the “scope, depth and power” (p.238) of research is intensified by this strategy. I consider using a mixed method approach is the best way of gathering the data needed to answer my research questions.

Punch (2005, p.26) discusses the continuum in design, research questions and data, ranging from a tightly controlled strategy which is pre-structured and generally adopts a quantitative approach through to an open-ended strategy that is likely to use a qualitative approach. The perceived value and reliability of approaches have been debated (Hammersley, 2011; Silverman, 2010; Denscombe, 2007; Punch, 2005) using the terminology ‘paradigm wars’ emanating from the conflicting underlying philosophies of the proponents. Positivism developed from early scientific study and underpins claims that science provides the most reliable model of knowledge (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p.8). The interpretive paradigm acknowledges that “reality is a human construct” (Wellington, 1996, p.12) and consequently seeks to understand individuals’ perceptions of their worlds. Positivism has been associated with quantitative methods, offering “objective accounts of the world” where the data is numerical (Punch, 2005, p.28); qualitative research follows the interpretive theory, seeking to understand individuals’ interpretations of the world around them (Cohen et al., 2000, p.22) using “non-numerical data” (Punch, 2005, p.28). Denscombe (2007) suggests mixing approaches offers a third way of structuring the research design, the choice I made for my study.

3.4.iii. Quantitative methods.

“Quantitative data are...information about the world, in the form of numbers” (Punch, 2005, p.55). Bryman (2004) reflecting on the use of measurement ascertains that it supplies consistency and “provides the basis for the more precise estimates of the degree of relationship between concepts” (p.66). I examined relationships between childminders’ interpretation of quality practice and the quality practice that had been identified in Ofsted reports; relationships between childminders’ opinions of different aspects of support and the provision LAs offer. I interrogated Ofsted (2008-2012) data bases and records from which I produced quantitative data to identify the group of childminders who met the criteria of living in a rural LA and achieving an ‘outstanding’ inspection outcome between September 2008 and August 2009.

I sent a questionnaire to all 152 English LAs to ascertain the support offered to childminders. I proposed to make comparisons between LAs with the intention of exploring links between support offered and Ofsted judgements childminders received. In order to facilitate this it was necessary to devise a questionnaire that would provide the data to achieve this objective; consequently questions that produced numerical data were used. Both counting and scaling were used in the data analysis. The semi-structured interview schedule used with the childminders included questions that produced some quantitative data so that similarities could be identified and explored further. Incorporating quantitative methods into the research made it possible to make comparisons in a standardised way (Punch, 2005, p.56).

3.4.iv. Qualitative methods.

Qualitative data differs from quantitative data inasmuch that the units of analysis are imposed by the researcher rather than from a numerical

structure (Punch, p.58). Incorporating a qualitative approach enabled me to learn more about the individual experiences, practice and provision of the childminders and provided contextual data that allowed for a shared construction of reality (Silverman, 2010; Flick, 2006). I was able to explore each participant's situation in depth, obtaining rich data that was not restricted by predetermined categories; the analysis emerged from patterns within childminders' responses (Patton, 2002).

3.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Throughout my research I have attended to my obligations towards the research participants and the University of Sheffield. I have carefully considered my responsibilities throughout and will set out the steps taken at each stage the process, guided by my moral principles and beliefs. Ethical accountability permeates every aspect of research, from the planning through to dissemination (Economic and Social Research Council [ERSC], 2010, p.40).

Ethical approval for this research was gained through the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee; due regard was also given to the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2011). However, permission for the research to proceed is the beginning of a researcher's responsibilities and therefore ethical considerations have been integral to the whole of this research process; they have been the "moral principles guiding [the] research, from its inception through to completion and publication of results and beyond" (ESRC, 2010, p.40). The research has been "designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity, quality and transparency" (ESRC, 2010, p.6). The research was conducted adhering to principles of respect and justice for all participants (BERA, 2011, p.4); reflecting on decisions taken at every stage of the process ensures the highest standards of ethical integrity are maintained throughout. Drawing on the work of Alderson (2004) I have

sought the highest ethical standards to ensure the whole process is principled, insomuch as respect and justice for participants is upheld; the rights of the participants have been recognised; and no harm shall occur as a result of participation.

Potential participants were given full and detailed information which allowed them to make any judgements regarding the research process and details of whom they could contact should they feel there had been any breach of ethical guidelines (Flick, 2006) (Appendix 3.1).

3.5.i. Access to participants.

All potential respondents were adult and so were, with appropriate information, able to understand the proposed research project and implications of participation. I was aware that access to participants had to be obtained ethically. Initial contact with LA staff was through a generic email and so the appropriate person to deal with the request was decided upon individually by each LA.

Accessing childminders varied across LAs and therefore presented different issues to manage. Some LAs have a public database with contact details available online and so phoning individual childminders is an expectation. Some LA officers offered telephone contact numbers when I provided the individual Ofsted URN, either in a telephone conversation or with email contact; other officers forwarded an email with information about the research to appropriate childminders. However, some officers felt unable to pass on information or emails to childminders. Two officers informed me that if I had been a parent asking the same questions the information would have been available. However, approaching childminders using this dishonest approach would have been unethical, compromising the confidentiality they share with the LA and jeopardising the integrity of the project. I contacted an

online childminder forum and requested permission to make contact with childminders through the forum. I approached the moderator who posted information about the research including a participant information sheet (Appendix 3.1), explaining that I was not a childminder. I did not want to enter the forum under false pretences.

3.5.ii. Informed consent.

Research participants were provided with comprehensive information, enabling them to give informed consent (Denscombe, 2007). Information was emailed to LAs (Appendix 3.2) along with the questionnaires; and agreement from participants obtained. Childminders were emailed Permission Agreement Forms (Appendix 3.3) and an information sheet prior to interviews being conducted, ensuring they had sufficient time to read and consider the request. Providing full information made sure the participants gave valid consent and were not coerced into an agreement nor deceived as to the purpose of the research. During this preparatory stage of the interviewing process one potential participant requested certification of my student status, a copy of which was scanned and emailed to her; another, having noted the name of my research supervisor, queried the use of the study, a concern that was discussed and reassurance given that there was no connection to any other project my supervisor was engaged in. The right to withdraw at any stage was emphasised, with details provided enabling participants to make contact either by email or phone should they wish to do so. This right was reiterated during the interview process. Interview participants were told at the beginning of the telephone interview that I wished to use a digital recorder and permission sought. Full transcripts of the interviews were sent to the interviewees with the request that they either edit and return a copy with which they were happy; confirm they were happy with the copy they had received or request the content is not used. All participants agreed that their transcript could be used.

3.5.iii. Anonymity and Confidentiality.

To protect the interests of the participants (Denscombe, 2007, p.143) assurances were given that anonymity would be maintained; all references to names and to locations that could identify childminders were removed from transcripts before verification was requested from the interviewees. There were two interviewees who requested further information and the record of the discussions was included in the transcript; both sought to protect the identities of children for whom they cared and were reassured they would not be compromised. This issue was returned to at the end of the interview to confirm the respondent was happy with the conversation that had taken place and had no concern about the content of the discussion; both gave permission for the interview to be transcribed and on receipt of the file agreed the data could be used. Pseudonyms have been used throughout.

3.5.iv. Storage of data.

No sensitive personal data were collected (Data Protection Act 1998) however, due consideration was given to the storage of information provided by respondents. Files of information were stored on a password protected computer.

3.5.v. Other considerations.

Interviewees freely gave of their time to discuss their childminding practice; when asked, the time span of previous interviews was given. I was fully aware that I was benefitting from participants' generosity therefore whilst there was no monetary recompense, when appropriate I shared my professional expertise, for example, when discussing the EYPS or CPD,

consequently relevant information was emailed to participants, such as website addresses for The Open University or the CWDC.

The final Doctoral thesis will become a public document; by adhering strictly to ethical guidelines, I have ensured that no participant will be compromised or harmed in any way through publication.

3.6. METHODS.

Whilst methods are the tools or techniques used to address the research questions in the field, they are not selected in isolation, but with methodological consideration of the context of the research, the participants themselves, the proposed generation of data and the dissemination of the study.

The epistemological stance taken, focuses on a group widely unacknowledged in the early years' education debate (Owen and Fauth, 2010). Methods were chosen to ensure that opportunity was available for childminders to explain their perspective in depth. There were no limits on the length of time allocated for interviews and transcripts were returned for approval and verification, thus providing opportunity for in-depth discussion, reflection on and addition to, what had been said.

The methods used were:

- Document analysis - Database analysis of Ofsted results [n=3238].
- Questionnaire sent to all English LAs [n=152].
- Document analysis of Ofsted reports [n=83].
- Telephone interview [n=55].

3.6.i. Database analysis of Ofsted results.

An online database and document analysis was decided upon as being an appropriate method of identifying the numbers of childminders who had achieved an 'outstanding' judgement from September 2008 until August 2009, the first year of the EYFS implementation. The LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' childminders within that period could also be established. Having identified rural LAs, a weekly record was kept of the Ofsted reports published and an ongoing tally of each category of inspection outcome was maintained. There is little identifying information included in Ofsted reports, therefore these details potentially could help to locate 'outstanding' childminders. Reading inspection reports each week as they were published provided an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the inspection process and made the task more manageable. The name of the inspector who awarded an 'outstanding' judgement was recorded as it was considered that this factor could have been a significant feature of the statistics, although analysis revealed it not to be so.

3.6.ii. Questionnaire sent to all English LAs.

A questionnaire was emailed to all English LAs (n=152), following the collection of Ofsted inspection judgements for the prescribed period. A questionnaire was chosen to gather appropriate information from LAs because:

- There was the potential of a large number of respondents in many locations;
- The same information was needed in order to make comparisons between LAs;
- The information required was relatively straightforward to convey in this manner;

- There was an expectation that respondents had the capability of completing the written task.

(Based on Denscombe, 2007).

I aimed to examine the structures in place to support childminders in each LA in order to make comparisons, with the intention of exploring links between support offered and Ofsted judgements childminders received. Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010, p.8) claim little is known about the level of support offered by LAs to early years settings in the development of quality provision; however whilst the title of their research was 'Quality and Value in Early Years Education', childminders were not mentioned at all.

A fundamental issue considered when constructing the pilot questionnaire was that the respondents' interpretation of the questions would be the same as my own to ensure answers contained information I needed (Peterson, 2000). As the recipients of the questionnaires had been decided within each LA, the respondents would have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the structure of childminding support within their own LA to provide appropriate responses. A limitation of this method is that there was no direct interaction, so no way of verifying participants' and my understanding of terminology was shared (White, 2009; Petersen, 2000). However, there was either discussion or email correspondence with the pilot group and no issues of misunderstanding were identified. The survey questionnaire was used to explore specific aspects of this study and whilst acknowledging Robson's (1993) warning that it is the "quality of the individual responses... whether or not the often perfunctory survey responses carry real meaning" (pp.49-50), the piloting process had ensured carefully constructed questions through which I believed it possible to obtain reliable results (Robson, 1993, p.125).

3.6.iii. Document analysis.

Having identified the rural LA with the highest number of childminders awarded an 'outstanding' judgement, the 'outstanding' Ofsted reports were then analysed. Criteria, based on the EYPS Standards (CWDC, 2008) were used to interrogate individual reports, using key words to analyse the reports (Appendix 3.4). The first section, Knowledge and Understanding of Professional Requirements, is set out in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Key words used for Ofsted document analysis.

Element title	Words included in the search
Knowledge and understanding of policy, practice and guidance	Knowledge; understanding; Early Years Foundation Stage; EYFS; child development; development; learning;
Knowledge of statutory requirements	Safeguarding; safeguard; Child Protection; security; contact; visit;
Health and safety	Health; safety; safe; secure; accidents; risk assessment; welfare; hazards.
Links with other professionals	Professionals; settings; partnership; providers; agencies; special needs; SEN; individual needs; additional needs;
Appropriate policy and procedures	Policies; procedures; document; policy; organised; organisation;

Each report was analysed by colour coding the emerging themes and criteria (Appendix 3.5).

3.6.iv. Telephone interviews.

Interviews were chosen to gather data from childminders (n=55); it was anticipated that it would be possible to collect rich data using this method (Punch, 2005, p.168; Gillham, 2000, p.10). Emphasising the need for a "reflective and critical approach" (Wellington, 2000, p.83), piloting was undertaken with three childminders. Using a semi-structured interview schedule (Wellington, 2000, p.74), the opportunity for accessing detailed and concrete qualitative data was produced (Patton, 2002, p.438). The interviews for this study reflected a conversational style, though as there was

a research agenda structuring the discussion, they were “never *simply* conversations” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.117). The qualitative nature of the majority of the questions asked of interviewees meant that respondents were not constrained in their replies yet, having prepared an interview guide, it was possible to ensure the same aspects of their practice were examined (Patton, 2002). Careful probing was used to gain further explanation, and whilst taking care to ensure that prompting did not influence answers given (Wellington, 2000), replaying the interviews it became apparent that occasionally the language I had used was mirrored by the respondent.

The disadvantage of telephone interviews is that of not being able to observe body language, however, the recording of the interviews did allow for careful listening to the tone of voice of each participant. Potential research costs of conducting interviews with participants living in rural locations was highlighted by Hobson (2007) and for this study the dispersed locations of the childminders made travelling prohibitive. The nature of home-based childcare also presents time restraints; consequently telephone interviews allowed for the arrangement of a convenient time and had the flexibility of rescheduling when necessary.

3.7. THE RESEARCH LOCATION AND PARTICIPANTS.

Telephone interviews were carried out with 55 childminders living within 18 LAs identified as being ‘rural’ according to DEFRA coding. As Hodges and Monk (2004) note, there are urban and sparsely populated areas within rural regions as well as remote locations. The participants were chosen because they resided in a certain category of LA which I had surmised presented different challenges to those of an urban or more compact LA. As I had used purposive sampling – the participant had to have achieved an ‘outstanding’ Ofsted judgement between September 2008 and August 2009 – and I had

been restricted by the inaccessibility of information for some LAs, the remoteness or not of the childminder was an unknown variable. Location was established during the interview. My initial aim was to conduct interviews with all childminders living in the rural LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' judgements awarded. Initial email contact and follow-up calls secured six interviewees in this LA. Consequently, my plans evolved during the research process to include all 19 rural LAs and a proposed figure of three participants per LA was decided upon. I conducted interviews with three childminders living in 15 of the remaining 18 LAs. Additionally, one LA had no childminders fitting this criteria; one LA had two childminders achieving an 'outstanding', both of whom were interviewed. There were problems finding three interviewees in one LA in which few childminders had achieved 'outstanding' and of those who had, several had stopped childminding and were inaccessible, therefore only two interviews were conducted within this LA.

3.8. STRATEGIES USED FOR ANALYSING DATA.

The use of several methods allowed for a picture to be built up (Wellington, 2000). The analysis used for each of the methods employed will be discussed.

3.8.i. Ofsted online data.

Each week I examined reports published by Ofsted for inspections that had taken place in rural LAs between September 2008 and August 2009 (n=3238). A running record was maintained and at the end of October 2009, which allowed for later entries to be published, Microsoft Excel application was used to construct pie graphs that provided the information showing the percentage of 'outstanding' inspection judgements awarded to childminders within each LA.

3.8.ii. Local authority survey.

Information provided by LA officers from 45 LAs was entered into a series of grids that allowed for tallying and subsequent compilation of tables. Sections of data were entered into Microsoft Excel application to create graphs.

3.8.iii. Ofsted reports.

Every 'outstanding' Ofsted report from the LA which had the highest number of 'outstanding' judgements was interrogated using the Microsoft Word application 'Find' facility. From this data, graphs were constructed, which have been used in following chapters where I discuss my findings. This was repeated for the reports of all childminders interviewed.

3.8.iv. Childminder interviews.

The childminder interview schedule produced both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft Excel to create graphs. Qualitative data produced through interviews was analysed using 'Qualitative Content Analysis' (QCA) (Schreier, 2012) by creating categories and coding frames. The transcripts of the interviews were interrogated by careful reading and re-reading to identify emerging categories. I analysed the response to each question across all participants and links between emerging concepts were identified.

3.9. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY.

Bryman (2004) discusses the difficulty of proving the reliability and validity of qualitative research (p.273) and suggests instead that alternative criteria is

used to authenticate the research process and findings, that of “trustworthiness”. Therefore in this study these standards have been reflected upon to ensure a principled approach has been upheld.

Trustworthiness –

- Credibility – the interview transcripts were submitted to the participants for verification.
- Transferability – the “intensive study of a small group” has produced data that though not generalisable, have elements that can be equated to other childminders practising within other locations. Relating findings to other literature will ascertain transferability.
- Dependability – detailed records have been maintained throughout the research process; examples have been included in the appendices and full records are available from the researcher.
- Confirmability – Bryman notes that “complete objectivity is impossible”; however having clarified my positionality, the research has been undertaken “in good faith” (Bryman, 2004, p.275).

3.10. THE LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.

In order to identify the LA with the highest number of childminders obtaining an ‘outstanding’ judgement, inspection reports published by Ofsted had to be collected for more than 12 months before the next stage of data collection with childminders could proceed. The introduction of the EYFS in 2008 determined the start date for this stage of data collection and whilst it was a lengthy process which became a drawback, it did provide a ‘level playing field’ as all childminders were being judged using a national framework.

The return rate of questionnaires sent to LAs which included a second request was 29%. It became apparent from those returned that the information I requested was not always readily available; this might have been a contributory factor. Although the questionnaire had been piloted with staff at three LAs, a shorter format might have produced more replies. Several LA officers responded that data or personnel were unavailable due to the reorganisation of administration taking place within the LA. Eight of the 19 rural LAs responded and it was fortuitous that the LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' childminders was included amongst this number. Concentrating upon only the rural LAs might have proved more successful; however combined with accessible public Ofsted information, the data proved to be informative.

I did not ask about the qualifications of the LA officers. The significance of this came to light through email correspondence; a respondent explained that she was studying for a degree and asked if I could clarify terminology she had come across in her study. Working within LAs I had found that officers supporting early years practitioners had lower or the same qualifications as those they were advising; mirroring findings relating to training providers (Nutbrown, 2012a, p.39).

Weaknesses in the research methodology were:

- The impracticalities of conducting face to face interviews with the participants. Given this was a project carried out by a lone researcher, time and financial cost precluded visits to the individual settings. Under the circumstances, information was gathered from as wide a range of practitioners as was possible.
- I was unable to include any male childminders in the sample. Six male childminders had achieved an 'outstanding' judgement across the 19 rural LAs. I emailed the one 'outstanding' male childminder for

whom I had contact details, but received no reply. I had no contact details to identify the remaining five male childminders.

- There were no data gathered from children or families. Information gained could potentially have provided a greater insight into the 'jigsaw' of quality (Mathers, 2012, p.44), however time and financial constraints were prohibitive.

3.11. SUMMARY.

This chapter has set out the methodological issues that have been addressed during the research process. The ways in which my epistemological stance has influenced the process has been discussed. The conceptual framework was set out and the rationale for the approach taken explained. Ethical considerations were examined and the steps taken to ensure a principled study were described. The methods employed to collect data were detailed and strategies used to analyse the information gathered clarified. Appreciation of the difficulty of presenting reliable and valid qualitative data was acknowledged and an alternative approach explored and used to provide the rationale for an honest project. The limitations and possible drawbacks of the research process were discussed.

The next chapter sets out the findings and the analysis of the research conducted with LAs and presents the analysis of the Ofsted data.

Chapter Four: Local Authority Survey and Ofsted Data

Analysis. Presentation of Findings.

This chapter will first set out an analysis of data and findings from the questionnaire survey returned by 45 of the 152 LAs in England. This information was gathered to gain an understanding of the support offered to childminders and to explore relationships between LA support and childminders achieving 'outstanding' inspection judgements. An analysis of 'outstanding' Ofsted reports of the childminders in the rural LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' judgements and the 55 childminders with whom telephone interviews were conducted is then presented.

I will begin by explaining how the rural LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' childminders was identified.

4.1. OFSTED JUDGEMENT ANALYSIS.

Inspection reports published by Ofsted are uploaded onto its website. Each week, I examined the database and the number of 'outstanding' judgements awarded to childminders in rural LAs weekly, from September 1st 2008 to August 31st 2009 recorded (Table 4.1). The time between inspection and publication of report, generally about three weeks, varies and information was scrutinised for a further six weeks, until mid October 2009. Since my data collection, Ofsted added more information and published a data set that incorporated an additional month (September 2009). Consequently, although there are slight variations between my original figures and latterly uploaded data, all published information was checked to ensure that the data set I have worked on accurately reflected the final Ofsted information. LAs are identified as this information is derived from data in the public domain. The numbers are based on childminders inspected during the twelve month period and the percentage relates to that specific group. There is no

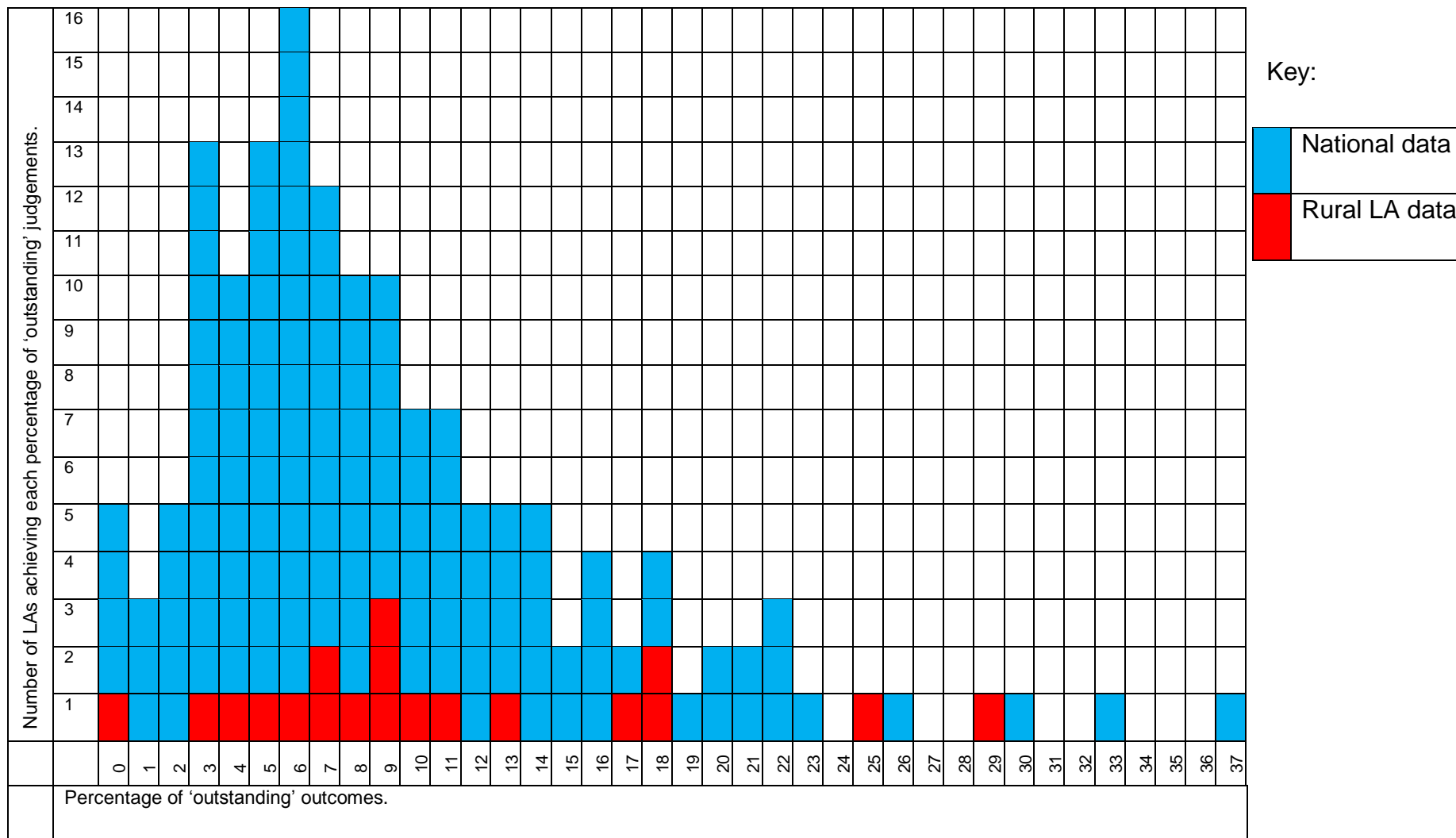
indication that Ofsted inspects an equal proportion of childminders annually in each LA.

Table 4.1 Ofsted information published between 01.09.2008 and 10.10.2009.

	Total number of childminders inspected 01.09.2008-31.08.2009	Number of childminders awarded 'outstanding'	Percentage of 'outstanding' childminders
Cambridgeshire	247	18	7.28%
Cornwall	130	23	17.69%
County Durham	161	6	3.72%
Cumbria	128	8	6.25%
Derbyshire	170	8	4.70%
Devon	184	34	18.47%
Dorset	172	15	8.72%
Isle of Wight	21	6	28.57%
Isles of Scilly	8	2	25%
Lincolnshire	281	9	3.20%
Norfolk	280	21	7.50%
North Yorkshire	246	22	8.94%
Northumberland	124	11	8.87%
Oxfordshire	247	31	12.55%
Rutland	9	0	0%
Shropshire	136	14	10.29%
Somerset	180	30	16.66%
Suffolk	270	20	7.40%
Wiltshire	236	26	11.01%
Mean figure of 'outstanding' outcomes in rural LAs			11.00%

The national mean figure for childminders achieving an 'outstanding' judgement across all LAs for this period of time was 9%; 11 of the 19 rural LAs achieved this figure. The mean average for rural LAs was higher than the national figure. Figure 4.1 imposes the data for rural LA 'outstanding' outcomes on the national data.

Figure 4.1 Overview of 'outstanding' judgements 01.09.2008 – 30.09.2009.



The terminology ‘Local Authority’ belies the disparity between each of the individual public administrative councils that make up the sector responsible for the organisation of services for children and young people within its boundaries, this being only one of the services provided. Huge differences in geographical area and population size in LAs across England, make comparison problematic (ONS, 2009). Table 4.2 provides an overview of rural LAs.

Table 4.2 Rural LA area and population figures.

Local Authority	Area –Km²	2009 Estimated Population
N. Yorkshire	8,654	597,700
Lincolnshire	6,959	697,900
Cumbria	6,768	495,000
Devon	6,707	747,400
Shropshire	3,197	291,800
Norfolk	5,371	853,400
Northumberland	5,013	311,400
Somerset	4,171	523,500
Suffolk	3,801	714,00
Cornwall	3,563	531,100
Wiltshire	3,485	456,100
Cambridgeshire	3,389	607,000
Durham	2,676	506,400
Dorset	2,653	404,000
Derbyshire	2,625	760,000
Oxfordshire	2,605	640,000
Isle of Wight	384	140,000
Rutland	382	38,400
Isles of Scilly	16.3	2,200

Table 4.2 shows the disproportionate area and population statistics for the last three LAs listed. Each had fewer childminders inspected in total than the number of ‘outstanding’ judgements awarded to childminders in other LAs (Table 4.1). Specifically, in the Isles of Scilly, eight childminders were inspected; there were 15 other rural LAs with eight or more ‘outstanding’ judgements. The Isle of Wight had 21 childminders inspected and there were seven rural LAs with 21 or more ‘outstanding’ judgements awarded.

Consequently for this study, I considered the rural LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' judgements as the most successful and carried out my first Ofsted report analysis on the 'outstanding' reports from this LA, rather than the LA with the highest percentage of 'outstanding' outcomes.

4.2. LOCAL AUTHORITY SURVEY.

The purpose of the LA survey was to establish the support offered to childminders and to find relationships between support and 'outstanding' judgement awards. The Childcare Act 2006 (OPSI, 2006) charged English LAs to 'improve the well-being ... and to reduce the inequalities of young children in their area' (p.1) and directed each LA to 'secure the provision of information, advice and training to... persons providing childcare in their area' (p.7). A questionnaire (Appendix 4.1) was sent to each of the 152 LAs in England to establish the range of support offered to childminders practising within their boundary; initially 44 responses were received with one additional return after further contact. Some respondents noted they were unable to complete the questionnaire citing unavailability of data; information unknown or incomplete; inaccurate data held; upgrading of database; information kept elsewhere; and data available only for qualifications funded by the local authority. Some respondents commented that numbers were approximate. In some cases, no information was provided; for clarification, I have inserted the number of responses next to each Table or Figure thus: $n=$

4.2.i. Total number of childminders registered within all LAs.

The number of childminders registered within LAs ranged from 35 to 945. There were six respondents who gave an approximate number and there were no figures presented for one LA. There was a wide range of childminders within LAs across all DEFRA coded groups (Appendix 4.2), for

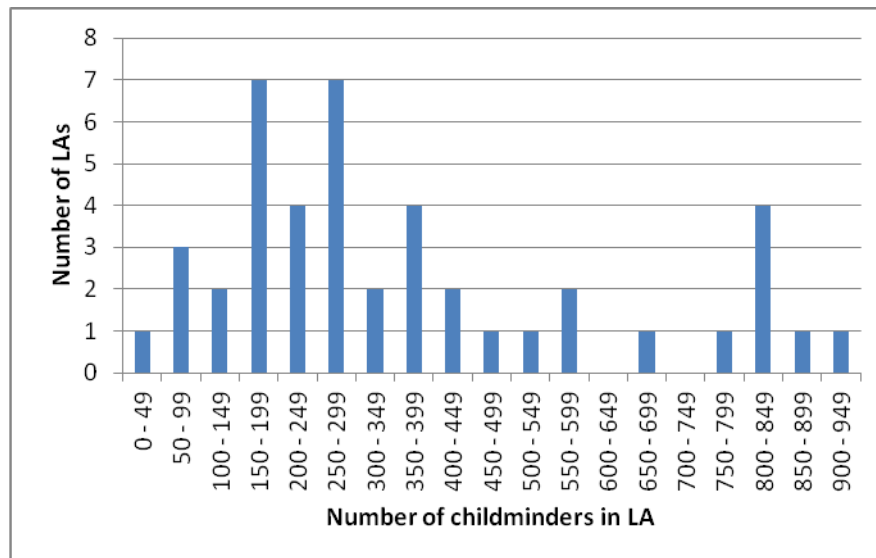
example one rural LA (Code 6) had 35 childminders, another 816. One major urban LA (Code 1) had 81 childminders; another 898 (Table 4.3). The mean number of childminders within LAs is 371.

Table 4.3 Range of number of childminders within DEFRA coded LAs.

DEFRA code	Number of childminders
1	81 -- 898
2	108 -- 364
3	91 -- 295
4	420 -- 829
5 (1 respondent)	289
6	35 -- 816

Findings showed a wide range in numbers of childminders within different types of LAs, from densely populated urban areas (DEFRA code 1) to rural LAs (DEFRA code 6). This data was further interrogated to establish the variation in numbers of childminders between LAs (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Numbers of childminders within LAs.



n=44

The rural LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders has 811 practitioners.

4.2.ii. Qualification levels.

Full qualifications of registered childminders were provided by 51% of LAs. Information recorded by the remaining LAs varied. Some respondents noted approximate numbers and some LAs provided data based on the number of childminders that had been funded to undertake courses leading to qualifications but held no other information. Nine LAs had no record of childminder qualification levels (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Number of LAs holding childminder qualification information.

Childminder qualification information held by LAs.	Number of LAs
Full information	23
Partial information	13
No information.	9

The rural LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders holds full records of childminders’ qualifications.

4.2.iii. Provision of support.

The majority of support is provided directly by LA employees; however, 30% is delivered in conjunction with or solely through Service Providers (Table 4.5). The National Childminding Association was the most prominent Service Provider.

Table 4.5 Providers of support for childminders.

Support for childminders	Number of LAs
Support provided solely by LA	31
Support supplied by Service Provider	4
Support shared by LA and Service Provider	9
No information provided	1

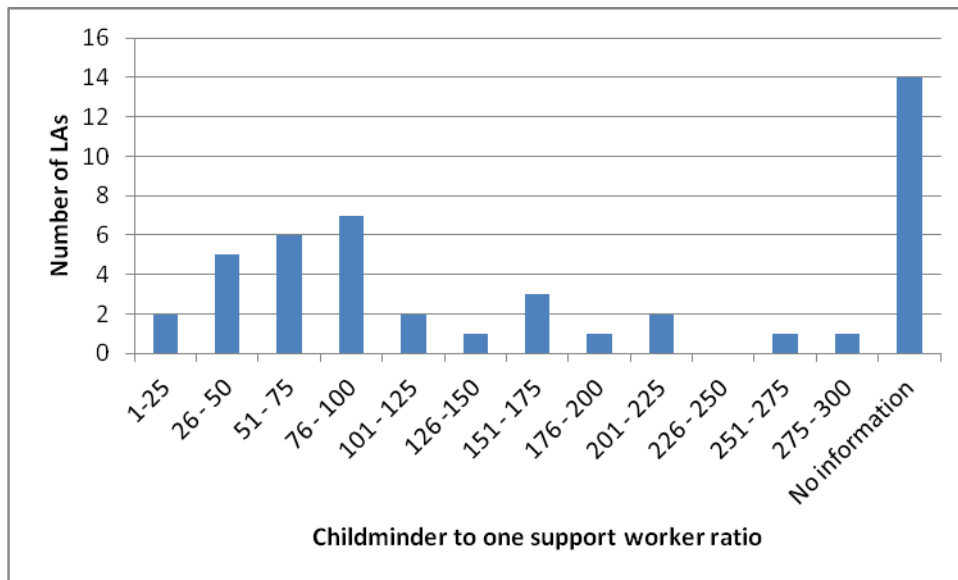
The rural LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders shares support with a Service Provider.

4.2.iv. Personnel supporting childminders.

There was less detailed information to ascertain the support available to childminders from support workers / development officers (Figure 4.3). Whilst the mean ratio of support worker to childminder was 1:187, the actual range was from 1: 17.5 to 1:298.

The rural LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders operated a ratio of 1 support worker to 74 childminders.

Figure 4.3 Ratio of support worker to childminder.



Data, where available, showed the role of support officers to be diverse; in the majority of LAs, childminding is the focus of a single or a small group of individuals whereas in others, supporting childminders is integrated with supporting other childcare practitioners (Appendix 4.3).

The rural LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders employed an officer with sole responsibility for supporting childminders.

4.2.v. Support for childminders through network provision.

4.2.v.a. Availability of childminder networks.

The organization of ways in which support is delivered varies; for some it is through individual support or development workers whilst for others a more comprehensive structure exists, providing a range of opportunities for contact

(Appendix 4.4). Seven LAs do not have an official structure of networks in place for their childminders (Table 4.6).

The rural LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders has an established childminder network.

Table 4.6 Childminder networks.

	Number of LAs
Childminder network in place	37
Without a childminder network	7
No information provided	1

n=45

These findings contradict the claim that childminders have to be members of a network (Truss, 2012b); there are LAs who do not operate a network system and others that restrict membership. One LA with 286 childminders restricts numbers to 20 in each of their 3 networks; another noted only 40 of the 150 childminders are allowed membership at any one time due to financial constraints. Additionally, the NCMA (2011) reported 57% of respondents were not part of a formal network and Fauth et al. (2011) recorded 52% of childminders did not belong to a network.

4.2.v.b. Network membership criteria.

The range of the criteria that childminders were required to meet in order to access network support varied from a specific indicator to less clearly identifiable measures such as ‘Meeting the EYFS guidelines’.

Meeting a Quality Assurance Standard was more frequently required than a specific Ofsted judgement; 17 LAs required childminders to be meeting the NCMA Children Come First standards (Table 4.7).

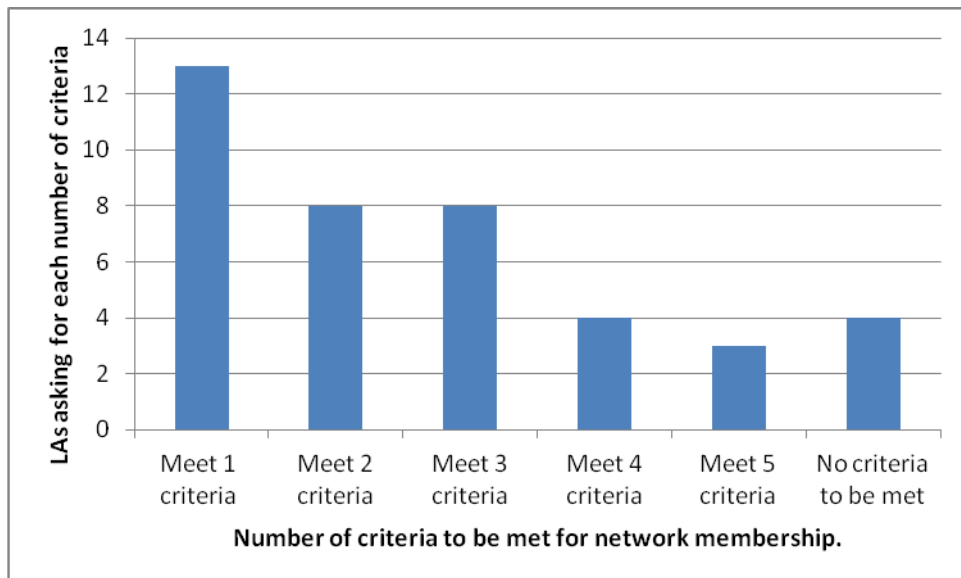
Table 4.7 Network membership criteria.

Holds Quality Assurance Standard	18
Agreement to attend training	11
Holds Level 3 qualification	8
Assessment of provision	7
Agreement to attend meetings	6
Ofsted judgement of 'Good' or above	4
Holds or working towards Level 3	4
Agree to monitoring/annual review	4
No criteria in place	4
Agreement to undertake Level 3 training	3
Unannounced visits are made	3
Childminding for 1 year	3
Ofsted judgement of 'Satisfactory' or above	2
Working towards Quality Assurance Standard	1
Completed SEF	1
Agree to make links with Children's Centre	1
Practises in the locality of the Children's Centre	1
Childminding for 2 years	1
Experienced childminder	1
Meets EYFS guidelines	1
Follows Code of Conduct	1
Delivering an agreed strand of network provision	1

The rural LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders has a structured system through which all childminders are supported to progress.

The number of the criteria having to be met in order to join networks varied between LAs (Figure 4.4). Whilst 10% of childminders can access networks without having to meet any set criteria, 58% have to meet two or more criteria.

Figure 4.4 Number of criteria to be met for network membership.



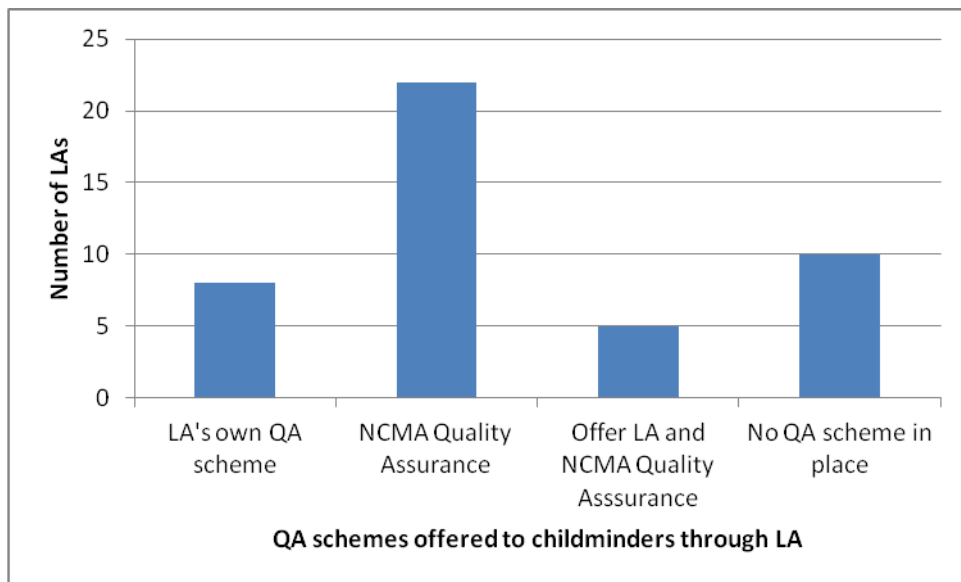
n = 36

Childminders joining the network in the rural LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders have no initial criteria to meet but evidence is required of practice and training to access higher levels.

4.2.vi. Quality assurance schemes.

Structured quality assurance schemes are available to childminders in over three-quarters of LAs - 78% (Figure 4.5). Accreditation through the NCMA scheme is the most widely offered route (Appendix 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Quality assurance schemes available to childminders.



n=45

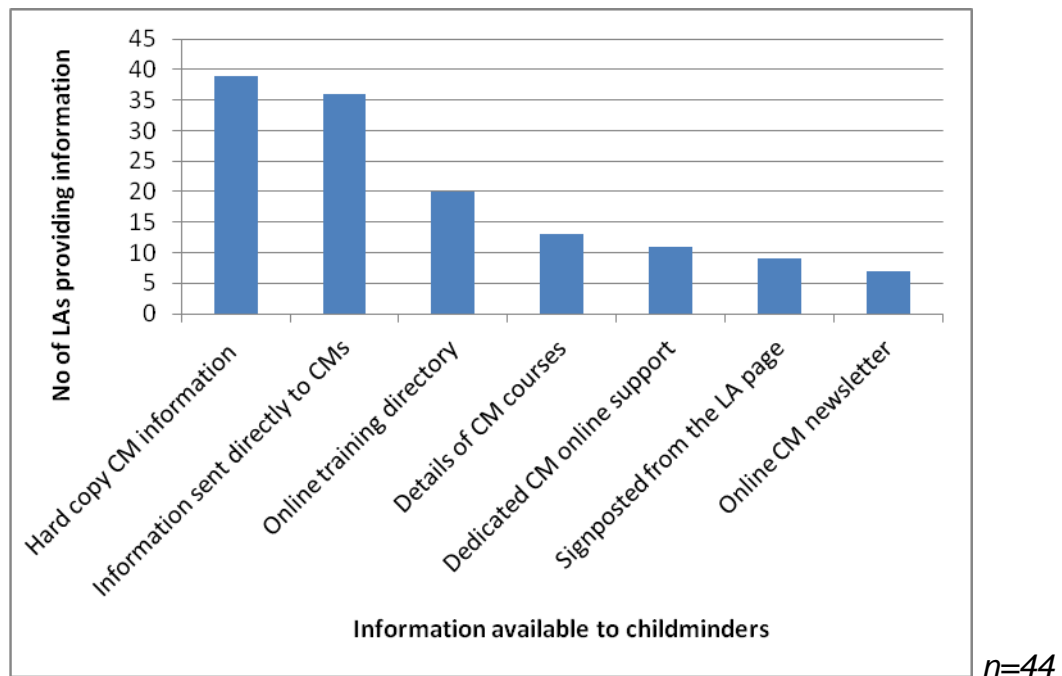
The rural LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' childminders has a quality assurance scheme incorporated into their network structure.

4.2.vii. Communication with childminders.

The majority of childminders received information from the LA through newsletters and Training Directories. Some LAs distribute information informally to childminders who attend meetings; most communication was posted directly. Online information covered initial guidance for prospective

childminders, training opportunities and links to other sources of support; however very few LAs maintained comprehensive online resources for childminders (Figure 4.6). Respondents from 11 LAs indicated there was online support dedicated to childminders; the information offered varied from initial guidance and contact numbers to a more detailed range of resources.

Figure 4.6 Availability of information for childminders.

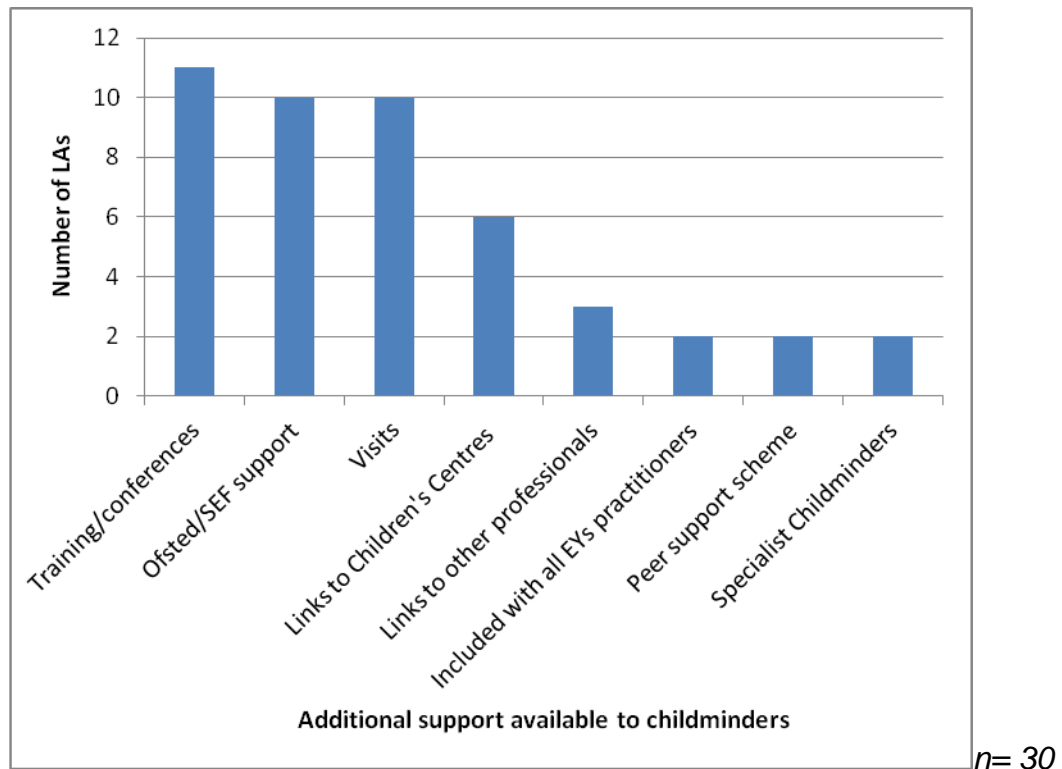


The rural LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders has internet information that is continually updated; hard copies of information are also sent to childminders.

4.2.viii. Additional information identified by respondents.

Additional information from 30 respondents has been themed and is represented in Figure 4.7. There were 18 respondents who listed the training, visits and targeted support offered to childminders.

Figure 4.7 Support highlighted by LA.



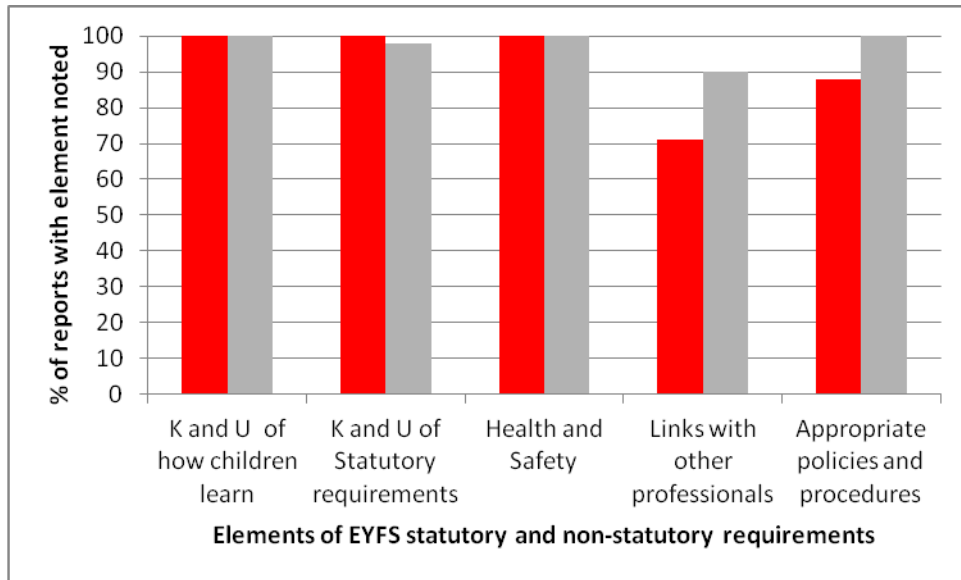
4.3. OFSTED REPORT ANALYSIS.

Initially I analysed the 34 'outstanding' Ofsted reports from childminders living in the LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' judgements. The analysis criteria used are explained in the Methodology chapter, Section 3.6.iii. I have discussed why I extended the sample size; consequently I analysed the reports of all 55 childminders interviewed (Appendix 4.6). The findings are presented side by side.

4.3.i. EYFS statutory and non-statutory requirements.

Figure 4.8 indicates Ofsted inspectors judged all childminders to have a detailed knowledge and understanding of the EYFS statutory requirements.

Figure 4.8 EYFS statutory and non-statutory requirements.



Key:

	LA with highest number of 'outstanding' childminders	Reports analysed	34
	'Outstanding' childminders interviewed across all rural LAs	Reports analysed	55

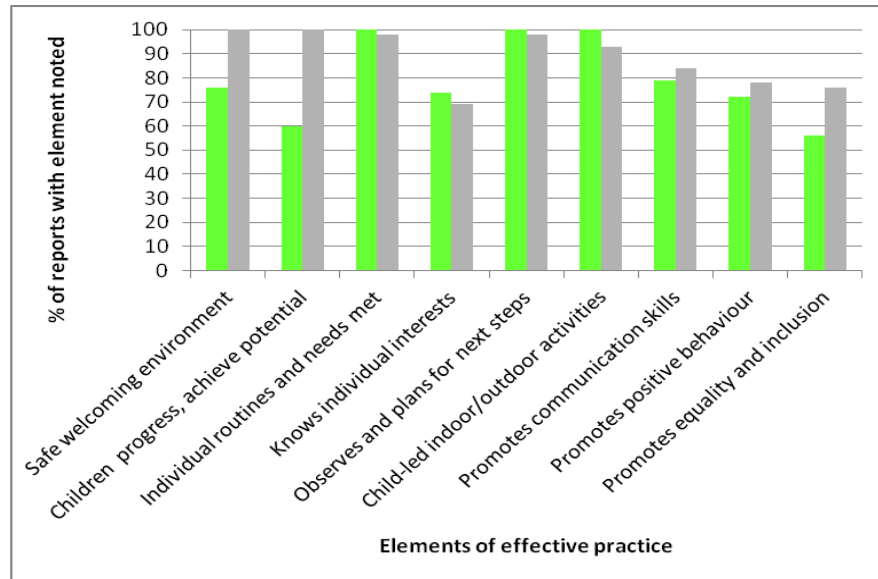
Fauth et al. (2011) aimed to gain an understanding of childminders' knowledge of the EYFS; 29.4% of respondents felt they knew the EYFS very well (p.44). My findings indicate that Ofsted inspectors perceived practitioners' knowledge and understanding as an important element of 'outstanding' practice. 'Links with other professionals' generally referred to practitioners in other settings, such as schools and preschools also providing care for minded children; links with other childminders were not reported by inspectors. Fauth et al. (2011) reported that over 50% of childminders had relied upon contact with other childminders to develop knowledge of the EYFS, an aspect of practice not acknowledged by Ofsted inspectors.

4.3.ii. Effective practice.

Reports show all childminders were effective at providing routines that meet children's individual needs, observation and using this to plan for children's

next steps and providing child-led indoor and outdoor activities. Promoting equality and inclusion was addressed the least effectively.

Figure 4.9 Childminders achieving effective practice.



Key:

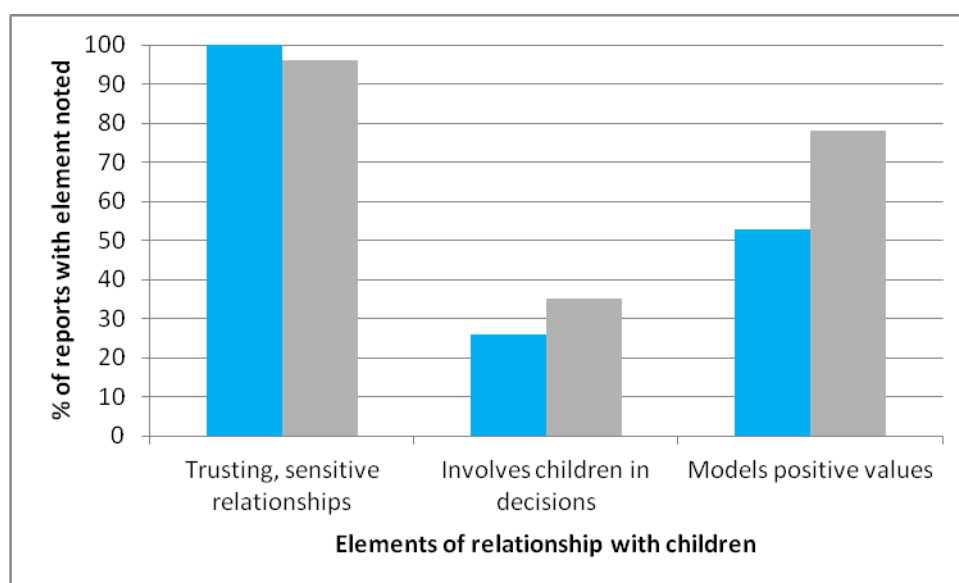
	LA with highest number of 'outstanding' childminders	Reports analysed	34
	'Outstanding' childminders interviewed across all rural LAs	Reports analysed	55

Fauth et al. (2011) reported high quality care was provided by childminders who based their planning on individual children's interests and needs (p.70), elements recorded as having been noted during inspections.

4.3.iii. Relationships with children.

All but one report highlighted the trusting, sensitive relationships childminders had with the children for whom they cared. Ofsted inspectors report over half of all childminders modelled positive values and just over a quarter involved children in decision making (Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10 Analysis of relationships with children.



Key:

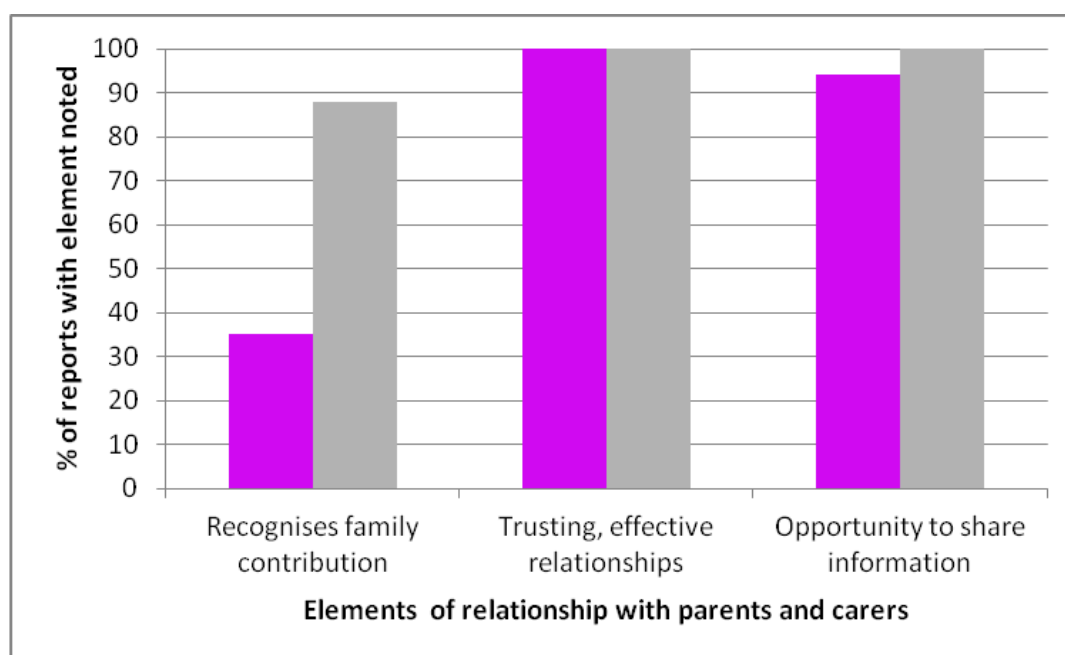
	LA with highest number of 'outstanding' childminders	Reports analysed	34
	'Outstanding' childminders interviewed across all rural LAs	Reports analysed	55

Fauth et al.'s (2011, p.73) observations of childminders also recorded warm relationships (p.55).

4.3.iv. Relationship with families and carers.

All childminders were reported as having trusting, effective relationships with parents and all but two were recorded as providing opportunities to share information with families and carers. There was however, over 50% more childminders nationwide recorded as recognising the contribution from families and carers (Figure 4.11). I looked for evidence that childminders valued the input of parents, appreciating the knowledge they possess and using it to develop the experiences and opportunities for children rather than simply reporting back to them.

Figure 4.11 Analysis of relationships with families and carers.



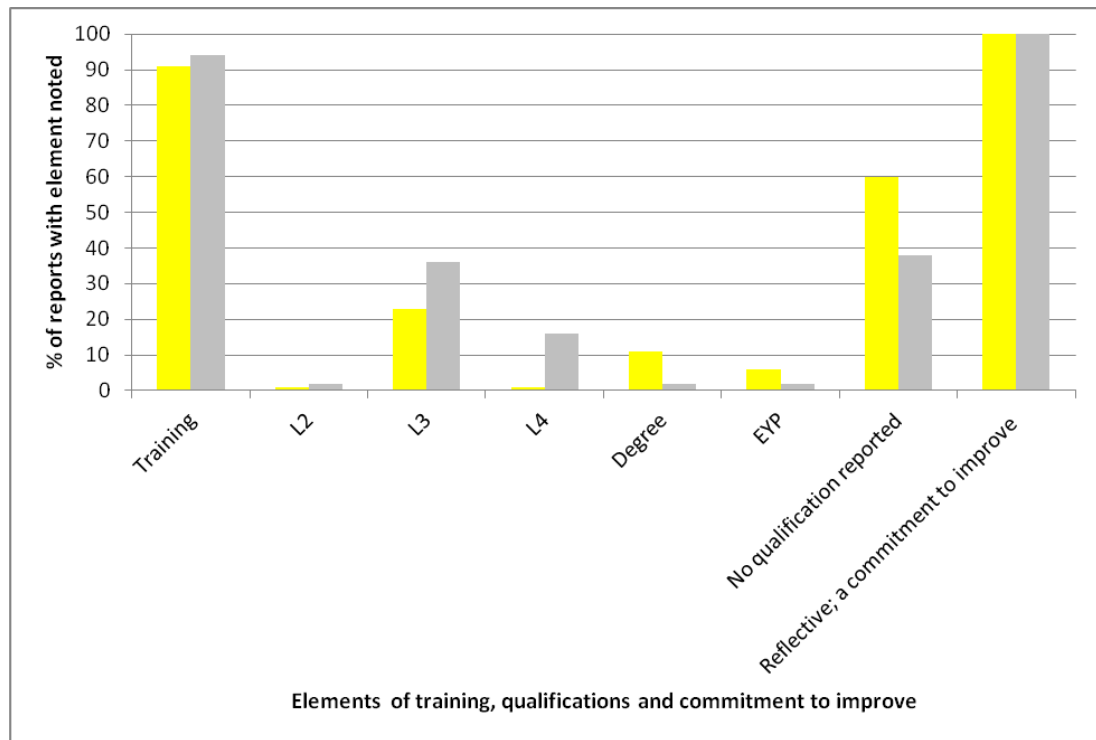
Key:

	LA with highest number of 'outstanding' childminders	Reports analysed	34
	'Outstanding' childminders interviewed across all rural LAs	Reports analysed	55

4.3.v. Training, qualifications, professional and personal development.

Ofsted inspectors noted that all childminders were committed to improvement and also made reference to either training or continual professional development in over 90% of reports. However, there was no mention of childcare qualifications in over a third of reports nationwide and 60% of the reports in the LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' childminders. There was no mention of childminders' learning dispositions, a factor identified by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002, p.104), or the amount of time invested in Higher level study.

Figure 4.12 Attendance at training, qualifications and commitment to improve.



Key:

	LA with highest number of 'outstanding' childminders	Reports analysed	34
	'Outstanding' childminders interviewed across all rural LAs	Reports analysed	55

4.4. SUMMARY.

This chapter has reported the findings from two of the sources of information examined for this study. Analysis of the questionnaires showed that statistical data available for childminders varies enormously between LAs; consequently it is difficult to draw sound conclusions from the evidence available. However, examining the available data, I found that the elements common to LAs with a higher percentage of childminders awarded an 'outstanding' judgement are:

- A structured quality assurance scheme;
- A person/s with sole responsibility for childminders;
- A structured network with regular meetings;
- A system of peer support.

The analysis of the Ofsted reports showed childminders who had been awarded an 'outstanding' judgement demonstrated:

- A detailed knowledge and understanding of the statutory requirements of the EYFS;
- Good knowledge of how children learn;
- Effective provision for children's individual needs;
- Trusting, sensitive relationships with children;
- An effective, trusting relationship with parents or carers;
- A commitment to improvement.

The analysis of the interviewed childminder reports indicate similar elements were present to the same or greater extent as childminders working in the LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' practitioners. This suggests that despite not having the LA support identified through the questionnaire findings, there are other factors that have contributed to their success. I sought to explore these reasons during interviews conducted with childminders to gain an understanding of the 'lived experiences' (Punch, 2005, p.238) of 'outstanding' childminders practising in rural LAs. The findings are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Childminder Interviews.

Presentation of Findings.

“There are still people that see me in the playground and say ‘Oh, it’s just the lady with the pram’”.

Jenna.

5.1. INTRODUCTION.

The results of the LA survey and Ofsted data analysis which used quantitative methods were presented in Chapter Four, reflecting the premise proposed by Wellington (2000) that “quantitative data provides structure”. I am now turning to the findings from the interviews with childminders to provide depth and “richness and colour” (p.19) to the study. Findings presented here and in Chapter Four will be drawn together and discussed in Chapter Six.

A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 5.1) was used as a framework for the 55 telephone interviews conducted with childminders who had achieved an ‘outstanding’ judgement from their Ofsted inspection between September 2008 and August 2009. The interviews were conducted between October 2011 and May 2012, following a pilot study that was used to refine the questions and gain feedback from childminders who were not part of the research sample (Gillham, 2000, p.55). The interviews, following the work of Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), became an extension of normal conversation enabling participants to talk at length if they wished about practice, provision and the support they receive. Interviews, which varied in length from 30 minutes to two hours were digitally recorded, transcribed and returned to the interviewees for verification before analysis. All information has been anonymised and pseudonyms allocated to each participant.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were drawn from the telephone interviews and were analysed accordingly. As well as generating statistical data used to compile tables and graphs, interview transcripts were subject to ‘Qualitative Content Analysis’ (QCA) (Schreier, 2012) by creating categories and coding frames. Socio-demographic information was collected at the start of the interview schedule. Three childminders had worked in other LAs but had done so at least nine years prior to the interview; information was collected only for the LA in which they now work.

5.2. LOCATION OF SETTING.

The average distance childminders lived from their county town, the administrative centre for LA business, was 20.5 miles. Whilst nine childminders lived within five miles of their county town, eight lived at least 41 miles away (Table 5.1). ($n=55$).

Table 5.1 Distance away from county town.

Distance from county town	Number of childminders
0 – 5 miles	9
6 – 10 miles	7
11 – 15 miles	7
16 – 20 miles	11
21 – 25 miles	6
16 – 30 miles	4
31 – 35 miles	3
36 – 40 miles	0
41 – 45 miles	2
46 – 50 miles	5
51 – 55 miles	1

The average distance a childminder lived from a town was four miles. The definition of a town was not given and so the interpretation is that of individual childminders (Table 5.2). ($n=55$).

Table 5.2 Distance from nearest town.

Distance from nearest town	Number of childminders
0 – 5 miles	40
6 – 10 miles	11
11 – 15 miles	3
16 – 20 miles	1

5.3. AGE OF CHILDMINDERS.

The average age of childminders interviewed was 45. The age of the youngest was 26 when interviewed and the oldest was 61. The interviews were conducted up to three years after the Ofsted inspection.

Table 5.3 Age ranges of childminders.

Age band	Number of childminders
26 – 30	2
31 – 35	1
36 – 40	9
41 – 45	20
46 - 50	10
51 - 55	11
56 - 60	1
61 - 65	1

$n=55$

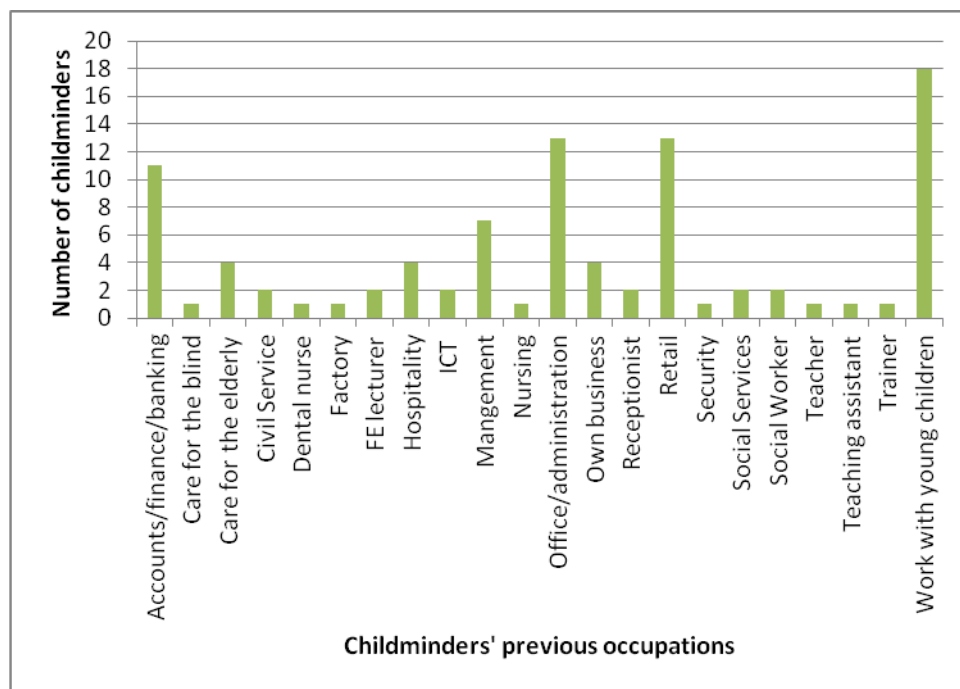
The mean age reflected recent research (Fauth et al., 2011; NCMA, 2011).

5.4. PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS.

5.4.i. Previous work experience.

Previous work experience had been varied; 22 childminders had worked in more than one field. Although 18 respondents had worked with young children before becoming childminders, the majority of the interviewees had not held jobs that included regular contact with young children.

Figure 5.1 Range of previous occupations of childminders.

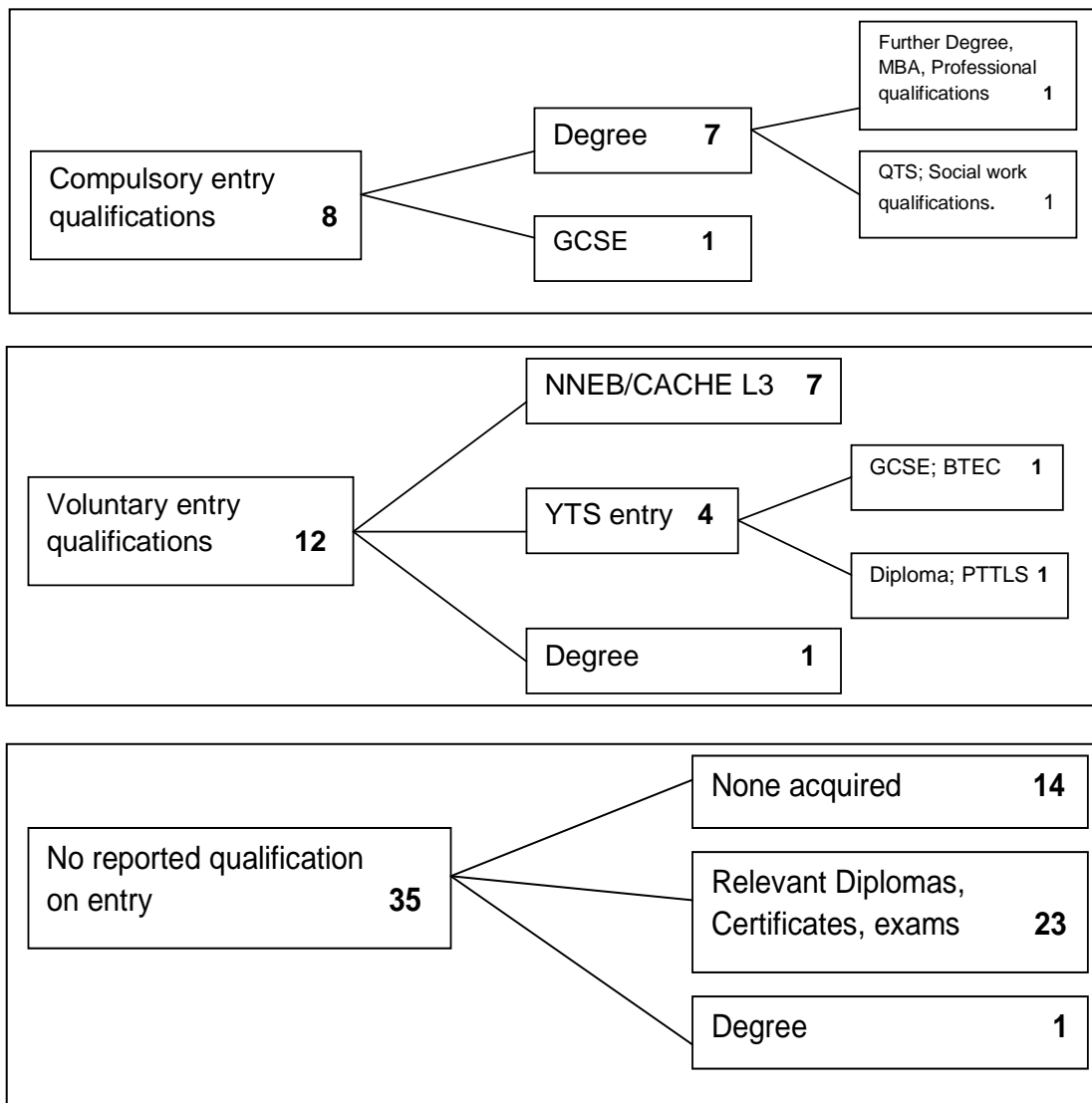


This range of occupations suggests these childminders have had a breadth of 'life experiences' identified as an element of quality (Mathers et al., 2012, p.35; Ben-Galim, 2011, p.29).

5.4.ii. Previous qualifications.

Eight childminders had entered previous employment that had required qualifications; 12 entered previous employment with qualifications gained voluntarily and 35 had no reported qualification on entry. I included this information because I considered there may be transferable skills from previous experience and qualifications. Findings suggested that the respondents had a disposition for ongoing learning. Figure 5.2 represents the qualifications gained during employment prior to becoming childminders.

Figure 5.2 Childminders' previous employment entry and exit qualifications.



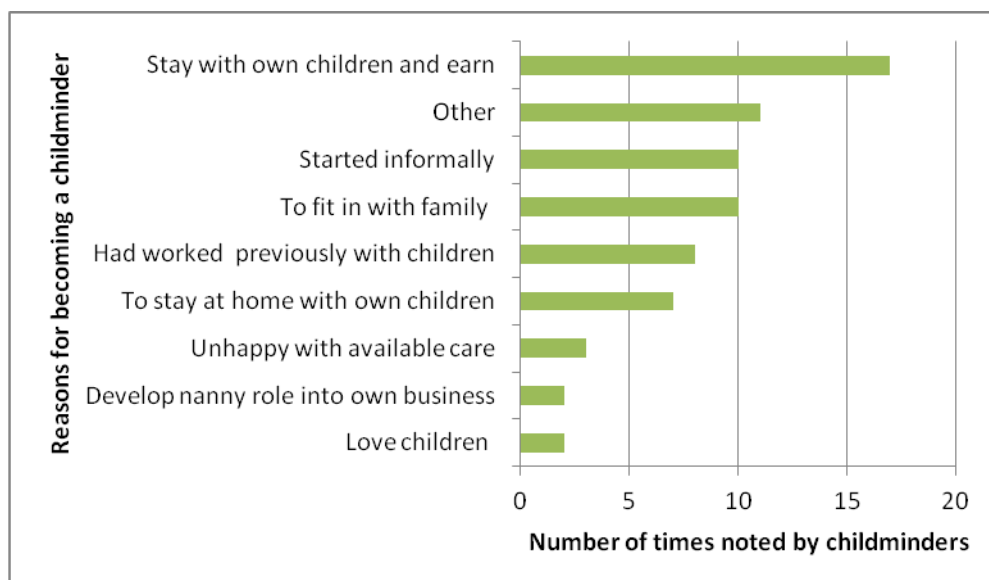
Twenty-eight childminders had gained further qualifications during their previous employment; although 36% of childminders had started their working lives with recognised qualifications, this had doubled during employment and 75% had entered their childminding career with recognised qualifications. These findings reveal this group of childminders held a range of qualifications; 18% had one or more degrees suggesting much higher academic attainment than that inferred by Brind (2011, p.108). The NCMA (2011) survey found 9% of childminders interviewed held non-related degrees (p.35) but did not relate this to the 13% of childminders interviewed who had received an ‘outstanding’ judgement at their last inspection (p.15). No Ofsted reports indicated the transferable skills childminders possessed.

5.5. CHILDMINDING EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS.

5.5.i. Reasons for becoming a childminder.

The majority of interviewees stated that childminding offered the opportunity to bring up their own children whilst earning an income. In addition to those listed, there were 11 reasons pertinent to the individual circumstances of the respondents (Appendix 5.2).

Figure 5.3 Reasons for becoming a childminder.



These findings reflect those of Fauth et al. (2011, p.39). “Helping other mothers” was included but is not listed individually here; however, that reason did emerge during interviews.

5.5.ii. Years working as a childminder.

The average length of time that interviewees had worked as a childminder at the time of the interview was 13 years, indicating that ten years was the average when inspections were carried out. The longest practising childminder had worked for 30 years and there were four childminders who had worked for fewer than 12 months at the time of their inspection.

Table 5.4 Average time spent childminding at the time of inspection.

Years spent working as a childminder at the time of the Ofsted inspection	Number of childminders
Less than 1 year	4
1 – 5 years	12
6 – 10 years	20
11 – 15 years	8
16 – 20 years	7
21 – 25 years	3
26 – 30 years	1
More than 30 years	0

n=55

5.5.iii. Qualifications undertaken since becoming a childminder.

Forty respondents said they had undertaken specific early years training since becoming childminders. Forty hold a Level 3 or higher award including those who already held childcare qualifications.

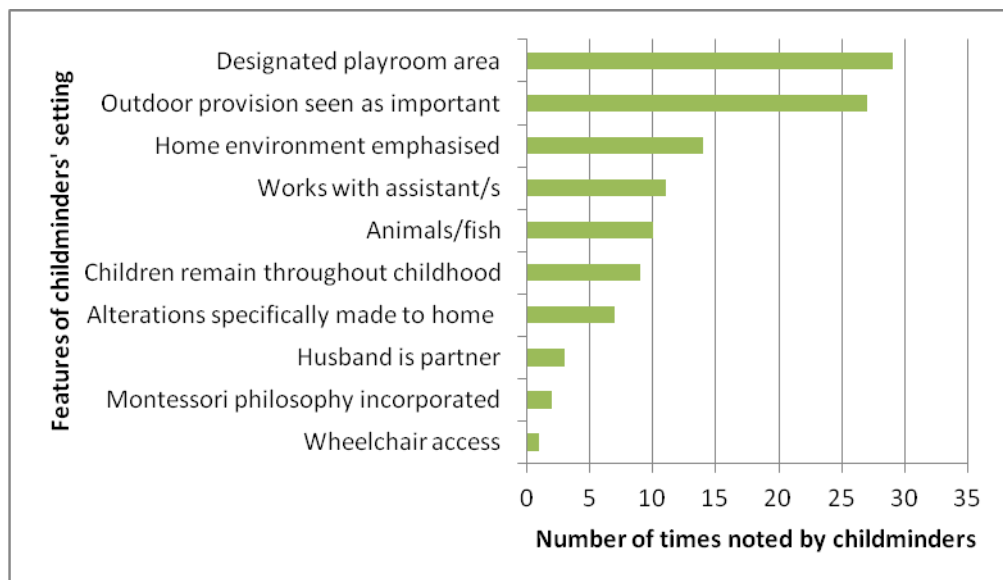
Table 5.5 Qualifications undertaken since becoming a childminder.

Qualification	No. of childminders holding qualification
EYP	1
BA	1
FDEY	6
L4	12
L3	31
PLA tutor	1
Dip PP	1
Montessori	3
Studying for FDEY	4
Studying for L3	1

These findings and those of Section 5.4.ii, contradict previous research, “That the childminding workforce was made up of women with low levels of education who had received scant training, if any, and did not feel further training or qualifications were necessary” (JRF, 2001). A significant number of this particular group were practising when the statement was made.

5.6. CHILDMINDERS’ SETTINGS.

Figure 5.4 Childminders’ descriptions of their own setting.



Homeliness was a recurring theme. There was pride in the distinction between the home environment offered and the perception of a structured nursery setting. Mathers et al. (2012, p.35) reported parents identifying homeliness as an element of quality suggesting a wish for a setting to reflect their own home. Amy noted the, “Home from home’ care; my home is not set up like a nursery”; a significant point because there was a feeling that childminders are being pressurised to change the ethos of their provision through Ofsted requirements. “It’s a family home, warm environment” Harriet stated and Libby gave details of how this looks in her practice:

There’s books everywhere; we have a toy cupboard so the children can help themselves to the toys...they can choose what they want. I’ve got an easel up – it’s just a warm, friendly environment really that’s messy and lived in!

The importance of children feeling at home was emphasised and the need for security from a young age explained by Josephine:

They have a separate room each that stays their room whilst they’re here, that becomes their bedroom, be it my lounge or my dining room, they see it as their bedroom and they [the cots] stay in that room all the time that they are here.

Beverley said children “have been coming from such a young age. It is very much their second home and I think that homely extension of our family feel came through in the inspection”. The kitchen is important in many settings and arrangements made so that mealtimes are much as they would be in many homes, a family time where all can be seated together. The familiarity and security that being together offers was seen as important, Lydia explaining it is a time when children “can talk things through”.

Some practitioners enjoy beautiful surroundings, descriptions of which would support the ‘rural idyll’ view of the countryside. Leni described her home:

I live at the top of a hill overlooking the beach and the harbour and the village, the whole of the valley really. I live in a large 4-bedroomed bungalow, with a large garden at the back, a nice deck at the front that overlooks the village.

Others had put thought into the development of outdoor opportunities. Paige said:

We've got not a huge garden but I think quite a reasonably stocked garden. Not so much of the climbing things because we live close to the park, just a few doors away. So we have more things like a music wall, and a mud pie kitchen and that kind of thing and chickens and rabbit.

Recognising the potential of the outdoor environment available to her, Lydia described developments she has made:

I've got a very big garden at the back...It's very natural; it's got a huge sandpit dug into one of the garden beds, and a wooden playhouse at the bottom with bunting. I've got a wooden wigwam...a digging area...a little vegetable patch...a decking area as well which we put big umbrellas and stuff over so they can build their dens outside.

Connie described the enjoyment the children gain from observing what goes on in neighbouring fields:

It's just fields at the back of the garden. The kids love it; they stand in garden all the time because we have animals in the field... they stand watching the sheep or the tractor or the horse.

Selina, recognising her good fortune, uses it advantageously, "I do a lot of outdoor play with children – I am very much into learning in the outdoor environment and I am lucky enough that I live on a farm so they have access to fields and the countryside".

Animals and pets were important to childminders and children; all respondents were keen to point out the measures they take to ensure children's health and safety around the animals. Sophia said:

We've got the chickens...which they love; we go and find out if they've laid any eggs and we've also got a field with an elderly horse and pony in but I only usually take the older ones in there because it is rough ground and it's very muddy and they can easily slip over in there. I've got two cats as well...A lot of parents who use me really want their children out of doors, I always talk about the animals when they bring their children here or come to visit and if they didn't like their children having contact with animals I don't think they would use me. I'm always very aware of the Health and Safety issues and take that responsibility very seriously...Several parents have said to me that they want their children to spend time out of doors; they like the fact that I am in that sort of situation rather than a nursery.

The opportunities for developing children's confidence is noted by Maria who said, "We have a dog and cat, which is useful as a lot of children are actually frightened of animals, which is really sad but once they're around the dog and the cat for a little while they're not afraid any longer".

5.7. CHILDMINDERS' EXPERIENCE OF THE OFSTED INSPECTION.

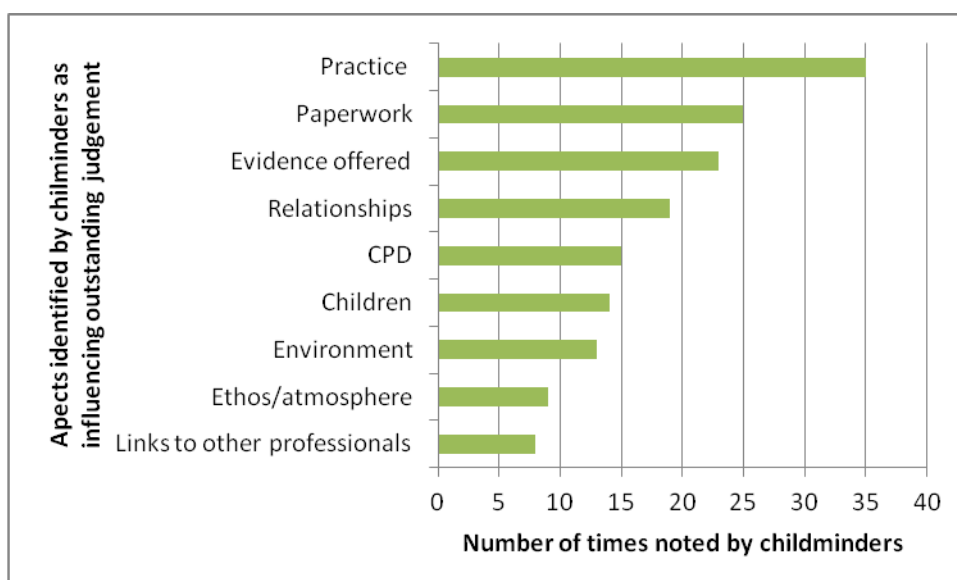
Varying accounts were given of the inspection process. Ranging from one hour 50 minutes to 5-and-a-half hours, individual Ofsted inspectors had coloured practitioners' recollection. Some were empathetic and interested in the childminders' work, proactively wanting to learn more about their role; one childminder recounted an unhappy experience, the Ofsted inspector being "rude, abusive and intimidating". This inconsistency resonates with findings that questioned "the skill set of the inspectors" (Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson, 2012, pp.26-27). Evidence presented to The House of Commons Education Committee (2011) states replies from 77 Ofsted inspectors to a questionnaire for the Committee confirm, "Almost 60% judged the performance of their peer inspectors to be variable at best" (4:70).

Some childminders were able to go about their usual daily routine, one Ofsted inspector joining a childminder for her daily walk; another reported not being able to take the children out as normal. June described the Ofsted inspector watching through the window as she played in the snow with the children; Elissa recounted how the Ofsted inspector had spent most of the time outdoors with her and the children. Andrea compared her experiences, the last Ofsted inspector "did interact with children well; the one before just sat there and looked and the children kept eyeing her suspiciously!"

5.7.i. Childminders' views of why they achieved an 'outstanding' judgement.

The majority of childminders considered that having organised and up to date paperwork, files and written evidence were major factors in the Ofsted inspector's view of their setting, echoing O'Connell's (2011) findings. "I really think the difference between 'outstanding' and fail could be one piece of paper", Maria said. Tanya thought her Ofsted inspector "was very paperwork orientated and I think the paperwork, at the end of the day, was the main thing that she was impressed by"; reiterated by Merryn who felt, "The paperwork appeared to be a priority". Eight respondents thought that the detailed completion of their Self Evaluation Form (SEF) had been an important contributory factor in the outcome, some thinking a judgement had been formed before the visit. Justine commented, "Coming here was more of a justification 'Let's see if it matches up with what's been said'". Twenty-six interviewees mentioned that evidence offered to the Ofsted inspector may have impacted upon the outcome. Children's journals, parent questionnaires, photographic evidence, organised files and responses from parents whom childminders had invited to contribute to the evidence, were made available.

Figure 5.5 Aspects of their practice and provision childminders believed to be 'outstanding'.

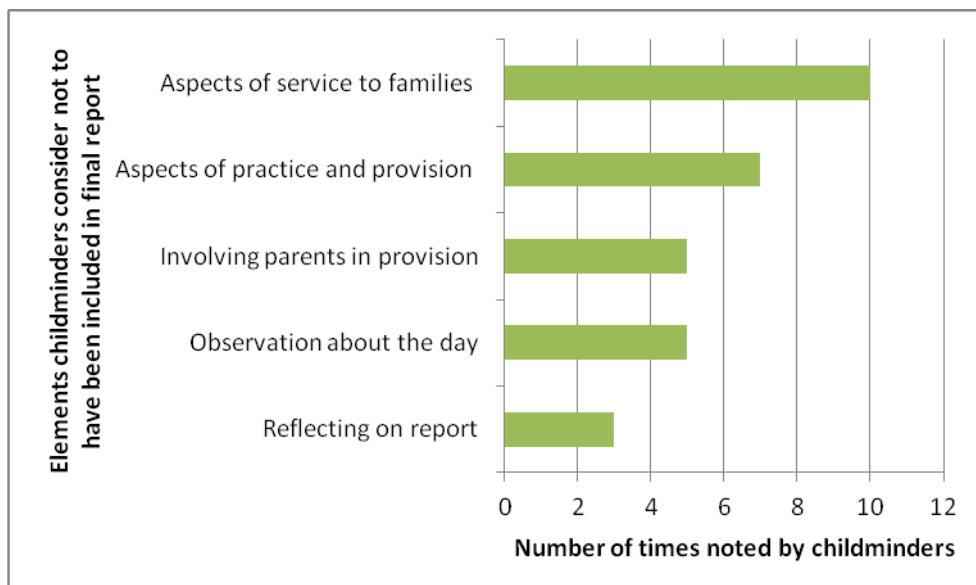


5.7.ii. Aspects of practice childminders felt were unacknowledged in an inspection.

Childminders were pleased to have achieved an ‘outstanding’ judgement; however, 15 felt that some aspects of their practice and provision were not acknowledged in the final report, reflecting findings that Ofsted inspections should be viewed as only part of a quality judgement (Mathers et al., 2012, p.93).

Childminders felt most strongly that the holistic and personal service offered to children and families was not brought out in final reports (Figure 5.6). Respondents reported that they regard parents as being part of the childminder family; it is the flexibility and support offered that enable parents to remain in employment. The importance of the childminders’ empathy cannot be underestimated; structured hours of other forms of childcare preclude parents from taking up employment and training (Ben-Galim, 2011; Callender, 2000), one of the objectives to reduce child poverty (Pugh, 2010; Sure Start, 2004).

Figure 5.6 Areas felt to be unacknowledged in published reports.



Some childminders proactively used strategies to ensure information was brought to the Ofsted inspector's attention and acknowledged. Louise pointed out things she considered to be important, the inspector "filling in the gaps where she felt it was necessary, mostly to do with paper work though".

Chloe was inspected by a former childminder who had a greater understanding of home-based childcare:

That made a huge difference compared to my previous inspection, in terms of her understanding of what we were trying to do or what it is you're trying to deliver....we try to offer them something that is much more home from home, much less institutionalised...we don't want it to feel like a nursery or an institution when you walk in, you want it to feel like a home and I think that she understood that very much...And I think she acknowledged that in a way that I don't think – having spoken to other childminders - all Ofsted inspectors would.

Ten childminders considered that recognition of a home-based setting and the family relationships that develop was missing from the final report. There were extensive discussions about the involvement and support for families that went far beyond caring for children; some childminders had taken on a much wider responsibility and caring extended to the whole family. Maria provides "a service to the mums - and dads too of course - but mainly to the mums because most of my mothers are single parents, it's just the way it is". This included picking up from and delivering children to home; looking after them when they were ill as well as taking them to clubs and after school lessons. This finding reflects that of Fauth et al. (2011, p.92) but contradicts that of Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002, p.106) who found only one childminder regarded childminding as a parental service. However, Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) did find childminders were sympathetic towards parents' situations (p.112). Lydia summed up childminders' feelings concisely:

It seemed to be so sort of factual...I would have liked to have seen more about the holistic side of care that I do; you couldn't even put a label on it probably. I think I would have liked to have seen a bit more of the nurturing side; the relationship with parents that nobody could ever see.

Kirsten suggested, "It was very much a paperwork report and less to do with the emotions that are involved". The emotional investment made was explained by Esther who works with her husband:

I think when you have them in your life, and some of the children do long hours here, some of them are full time, I just think of us as a family...our funny little family, we sit round at night and we have supper together, this is our family for that period of time ... I am really conscious of not making anybody feel different, you know, from our children. I hope when we are out and about people can't tell who my children are and who the minded children are, other than the fact that they address us as Mum and Dad.

Connie felt paperwork influenced the final judgement rather than the "ability to care". Sonia commented, "I do believe the onus now is on how good are office skills".

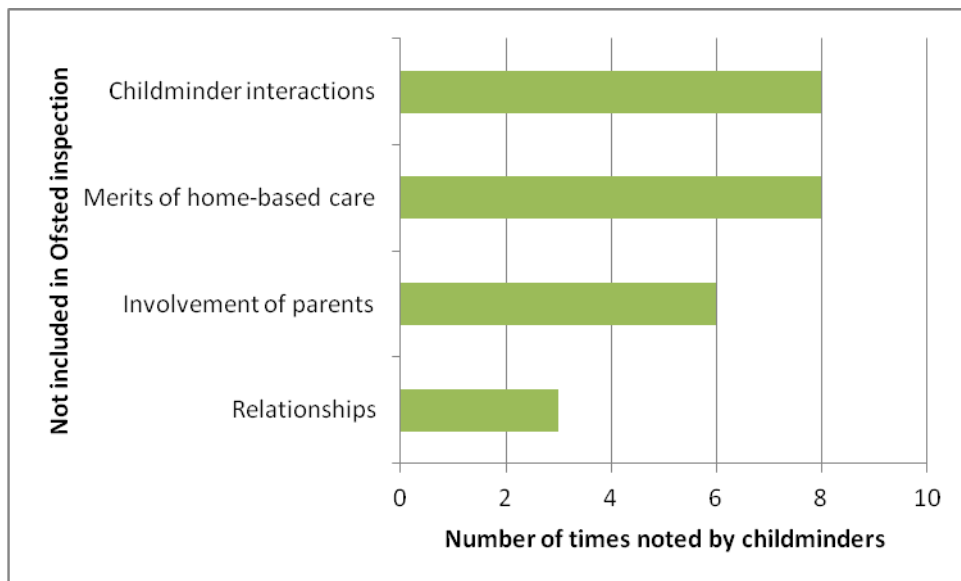
Childminders regretted parents were not asked for their opinions. Hannah commented, "You don't hear the parents' side of it". It was thought that examples from practice to illustrate the dry terminology would have brought the reports to life by linking their practice to the phraseology used. This would make reports more meaningful to parents; comments reflected in research by Mathers et al. (2012), who found parents felt the "format and language of the report... make[s] it difficult to understand" (p.50).

Some childminders were disappointed that issues that are important to them and their practice, influencing the ethos of their setting were either not included or the positive impact it had on their work with children was not reflect. The Montessori philosophy was very important to Josephine and recent Montessori training had prompted Maria to reassess areas of her provision; Cheryl was very keen to raise children's awareness of the environment and the importance of recycling which she proactively promoted. None were commented on; it was felt childminders' individuality was not recognised fully in the final report. Mathers et al. (2012) found parents agreed that Ofsted reports did not identify the aspects of quality they were looking for in a setting.

5.7.iii. Aspects of practice not included in an inspection.

The majority of the respondents, 55%, thought that the Ofsted inspection covered all aspects of childminding practice and provision. 45% identified four areas that they thought were not included – childminders’ interaction with children; the opportunities home-based childcare offered compared to institutionalised provision; parental input; and an acknowledgement of special relationships (Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.7 Childminders’ perception of the scope of the Ofsted inspection.



Commenting upon the apparent lack of importance attributed to interaction with children Lydia said, “I just feel that it seems to be all paperwork led and they need to actually look at the practice”. Parents confirm that reports do not convey information describing interaction between practitioner and child, which is seen as an indicator of quality (Mathers et al., 2012, p.44).

Specific safety issues were highlighted as being a concern. There is no checking of car safety seats, yet many minded children are transported in childminders’ vehicles. One childminder explained how a safe environment must be provided, the lack of which could mean ‘failing’ an inspection but felt

Ofsted appeared to have double standards as minding children in a house undergoing renovation work simply needed notification.

Childminders noted a lack of consistency between Ofsted inspectors. Tanya thought the process could feel unfair, observing, “There’s no equal standards...Each inspector seems to have their kind of a point, a ‘hot spot’ that they particularly like to see”, a point reinforced by respondents who gave specific examples of issues considered unacceptable by some Ofsted inspectors yet not by others. The way in which daily risk assessments were recorded or a policy for parental responsibility were cited. Amy noted the “changing goal posts” thinking a final judgement could be based on a whim or how an Ofsted inspector was feeling. Patricia recognised Ofsted inspectors have a difficult job, “It must be very hard for the inspector to determine somebody’s rating and how they are doing and if they are doing the right things from one day in three years”.

Beverley thought physical ability should be considered. Recalling a First Aid course when a childminder could not work on the floor, a dummy was lifted onto the table. Beverley explained it is not only the safety aspect:

To be able to interact with babies and small children it means getting on the floor, it means playing on the floor, it means lifting, carrying in and out of car seats, in and out of pushchairs, you know physical games, throwing up in to the sky, let’s climb on here, let’s duck under there; if [a childminder] is physically unable to do that, surely that’s going to be detrimental on the child’s physical development as well?

The implications for a lone worker are therefore very different from those of a practitioner in a setting where there is colleague support.

5.8. CHILDMINDERS’ DESCRIPTION OF QUALITY PRACTICE.

Asked to explain quality practice and provision, Kirsten said, “Quite different to what it means to Ofsted I would say”. Most apparent in responses was the

respect and trust between childminder and the children and their families. “It’s about how you interact with the parents and with the children”; Sinead’s comment encapsulates many of the proposed elements of quality practice and provision listed in Table 5.6. Comparisons will be returned to in the following chapter when data collected from Ofsted analysis is discussed.

Table 5.6 Childminders’ description of quality practice and provision.

Quality provision	Total
A positive environment in which children are happy	24
Providing the best for each individual child	22
Build a really good relationship with parents	20
Build a really good relationship with children	16
Keeping children safe	13
Keeping children secure	11
Child-centred	10
Children feel loved and cared for	8
Providing developmentally appropriate experiences/activities	8
Children supported to reach full potential	7
Providing the service parents need	7
Learning through play	7
Continually evaluating practice	6
Holistic – meeting all needs	6
Children well looked after	6
Way in which you communicate with children of great importance	6
Planning for particular needs and interests	5
Children secure in second home and parents happy to leave them	5
Observe to understand individual stage of development	5
Children become part of the family	5
Children have choices	5
Always there to support	5
Lots of resources for children to access freely	4
Committed to job and parents	4
Giving children a voice	4
Support parenting skills	4
Cuddles, praise and encouragement	3
Being totally involved in your work	3
Continuing own professional development	3
Challenging but not undermining children’s confidence	3
Multi-sensory approach	2
Offering flexibility to families	2
Developing independence	2
To understand parents’ relationship with their child	2
Helping children to build and maintain relationships	1
Ensure inclusivity	1
Involving children in everything	1

Mathers et al. (2012) noted that parents placed 'trust' as the "most important aspect" when choosing childcare (p.44). The emotions of the children were paramount and mentioned by 47 interviewees; they needed to have a "sense of belonging and feeling cared and loved" Patricia stated. Being included as part of the childminder's family was part of the sense of belonging and reflected findings of Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002, p.111). Maddy explained that:

Quality practice and provision to me just means giving everything I've got to the care, safety and well-being of the children...to make the children feel like they are in a second home...that they are loved and cared for, and it's not just me, my husband's here, my son's in and out because he is self-employed and works from home so it is very much a family thing and I think that all children that come here feel that....

Rachael regards her minded children as part of her own family recognising and responding to their needs:

They've got to be cared for and be given love and affection and we treat all the children whilst they are here, for the time they're here, like part of our own family. So if they need a hug they get a hug; if they need someone to listen to them we listen to them; or whatever.

This is an indicator of quality provision that is valued by parents (Mathers et al., 2012; Page, 2011).

Childminders' responses showed empathy for the children and their parents. Esther stated:

I think it's trying to put myself into the position of parents and if I had to leave my child what I would like to see. Hence the books, the diaries, it's trying to enlighten parents and share in their experience of the day; they were stuck in an office but it bridges the gap. I think it's a vocation more than a job; I think it's seeing it through different eyes and really working hard.

Justine articulated the anxiety parents felt and the need to help both parent and child with the transition:

It's helping them to feel secure. It's building that relationship up with the child and the parent in the first place which I can understand it is difficult for the parent and it is difficult for the child. The odd parent that I know would have stopped working if they hadn't had the support they needed to settle their child and that ongoing support and advice.

The majority of the childminders had been practising for an average of ten years at inspection and would have seen many changes. Annette regards, “Constantly evaluating what works and doesn’t work...and always keeping the child at the centre of that and what’s working well” as important. Although specifically mentioned by only six childminders, it has been necessary for all successful childminders to reflect on their practice to meet changing requirements. Fauth et al.’s (2011) identified that childminders who reflected, engaged in self-evaluation and acted upon this information were “high-quality” practitioners (p.80).

5.9. DEVELOPING ‘OUTSTANDING’ PRACTICE AND PROVISION.

Childminders were asked to consider factors that have enabled them to develop ‘outstanding’ practice and provision. They were asked about the sources of support they have received and how each has impacted upon their work.

5.9.i. Factors that have enabled childminders to develop quality practice.

Responses were coded through the identification of themes (Schreier, 2012) (Appendix 5.3) and findings indicated that childminders referred most often to training received since becoming a childminder. Interviewees were then asked to rank the factors they had proposed and a score was allocated to each factor depending upon the position in each childminders’ ordered list (Appendix 5.4). From this, Table 5.7 was constructed collating the results. In this instance other practitioners emerged as the most significant influence.

Table 5.7 Factors that have contributed to quality practice and provision.

Factor	Total score
Other practitioners	124
Early years training	78
Early years experience	75
LA support	42
Previous experience	27
Previous work	26
Development worker	22
Network	22
Self motivation	22
Family	21
Previous training	19
Being a mother/ parent	18
LA funding for training	18
Parents' / family feedback	14
Foundation degree	12
LA training	9
Self confidence	9
Organisation skills	5
Quality assurance process	5
Internet forum	4
Montessori training	4
Professional colleague	4
Reading	4
Business skills	3
Flexibility	3
Montessori practitioners	2
NCMA	2

These findings reflect those of Fauth et al. (2011) who found that over 73% of their respondents relied upon other childminders for support (p.43) and placed this source higher than LA support.

5.9.i.a. Previous work experience and training.

Those who had worked previously with children acknowledged that the experience they had gained had helped them in their present role. Felicity explained how her understanding had grown. “I am an only child so that did

start opening my eyes, it started awakening me I suppose to child development and how much you could enrich the environment to help the child”.

Some interviewees recognised that previous jobs had enabled them to deal empathetically with people. Pamela described how her caring role had equipped her because, “I was continually dealing with the public, you get to know people on a close basis – their fears...working for Social Services as well, it was caring, taking their feelings into consideration and being very patient”. Pamela explained how her own family circumstances had influenced her practice, “I have four children of my own which helps and I came from a loving family myself; I think probably the basis of all of my life has been the environment I was brought up in myself”. Eighteen childminders thought personal parenting experience had been important and Maddy specified the expertise she had gained “as mother of three under three because that has enabled me to cope with more than one child at a time in a very good way”.

The skills most frequently considered to have transferred and directly contributed to success were organisational and administrative competency. Polly noted that previous employment “helped with the paperwork side because I used to be involved in admin all the time and finance so things like accounts and invoicing and paperwork doesn’t bother me at all”; a comment that highlights the demands certain aspects of childminding can make. Beverley made a direct link between office skills and an Ofsted inspection:

Administrative skills need to be very good really if you are going to maintain any high standard with Ofsted because obviously you are reporting evidence to them, you are managing your own business so you are going to have a lot of counting to do, your daily diary sheets, a lot of it is mandatory so there’s no choice... it has to be done to a high standard otherwise Ofsted will obviously penalise you for it and because of my experience in previous jobs, I have got a little bit of experience to back me up.

There is no data to make links between administrative skills and success, however, as many childminders are lone workers they have to manage aspects of their business that would be allocated to administrative staff in preschool, nursery and school settings. Fauth et al. (2011) reported that childminders found the amount of paperwork generated by the EYFS to be the “most challenging” (p.45).

Chloe felt there were other areas of expertise she had developed previously and had been able to draw on in her childminder role:

I think to some extent the self reliance and self motivation from my previous job; and time management which I think is quite crucial because you do need to be pretty on the ball ... or it will soon go haywire when you've got a busy day with lots of children. And organizational capabilities and being able to think of solutions to problems. I think a lot of childminders become overwhelmed, particularly when the EYFS was brought in as to how they were going to cope with that and the paperwork, and I think my job enabled me maybe to tackle it a bit more head on and think this is the time I have got and how am I going to make it fit. I am fairly proactive of finding ways of doing things.

5.9.i.b. Training since becoming a childminder.

When asked directly about the impact training has, 49 childminders stated that it had been important in their development, reflecting previous findings (NCMA, 2011; Owen, 2005; Siraj-Blatchford, 2002). Table 5.5 (p.108) listed qualifications childminders have achieved since starting their work. Donna's comment is representative of many; “I've done...absolutely loads of training. I'm one of these people that thinks if you're going to do something you need to know a lot about it”. Jamie reflected on the breadth of training undertaken over the 15 years she has been practising and the value of her learning, “From child protection, first aid, which are compulsory, to training I have been offered and have accepted such as behaviour management, bereavement counselling. Far too many to mention but all are worth the work involved”. Tess thought gaining the NVQ 3 directly supported her work as “I had a lot in

place”. The comment Carley made is significant as it reflects the attitude of many of the childminders to continual professional development, “I have been on hundreds and hundreds of workshops and training and I’ve done a course with the OU; I’ve constantly tried to better myself with education”.

Interviews revealed that as well as developing knowledge and understanding, training gave childminders confidence when dealing with parents, as Maria commented:

When parents talk to me - because they seem to think that you are the expert! – I say ‘On my course...’ just to have more confidence to give them advice. I never say ‘I know this’ but ‘on my course, I read...’ it definitely helps and has built confidence.

It was pointed out by some childminders that they were surprised at the additional opportunities for training that joining accredited networks offered; Chloe said “There seems to be a whole tier of support that just wasn’t there before which I found quite interesting because until I did that I had never really seen anybody”. This is particularly significant as it suggests childminders without network access have disparate opportunities.

5.9.i.c. Support from the local authority.

Opinion of the LA support offered is perceived as being from practically nothing to extremely good and accommodating. Sally exclaimed, “No, none at all! I’ve never had anybody come to my home”. Elissa stated:

I have never had any; they’ve never needed to come out to me. In 11 years I’ve had two visits. Since my ‘outstanding’ I wanted to join the Network and become accredited so I could accept the government vouchers and offer continuity for the children so they didn’t have to go somewhere else, and I would have thought after achieving ‘outstanding’ the Local Authority would be asking me to register, but nobody contacted me at all.

The lack of communication from the LA following the ‘outstanding’ judgement and feeling of disappointment was mentioned by other childminders. Conversely, Maria explained how accommodating the LA had been when

she sought accreditation. “They have been able to adjust structure to further support me when they saw that the existing structure wasn’t working – they actually changed it”. Appreciation of funding enabling childminders to access training and pursue qualification courses which had developed knowledge and understanding, was mentioned by over a third. Donna stated, “From the funding point of view they were fantastic”. Beverley was enthusiastic about the support she has received commenting, “I really whole heartedly believe that this county is doing a good job”.

LAs that had quality assurance schemes in place were viewed as providing a structured support and were appreciated. Joyce felt that one of the benefits of completing the LA scheme was the knowledge it gave her as she “used the information from my Quality Framework Tool and filled in the SEF”. Esther also linked the LA scheme to her Ofsted judgement:

I think I got my first ‘outstanding’ because I was doing the... quality assurance. It was run through the local authority and it looked at every aspect of my practice. Greeting a child; saying goodbye to a child; feeding a child; having meetings with other childminders – every single aspect. And I think it caused me to reflect on everything ... I would try different things and then whatever sort of suited me and things that fitted into the way we work were the things that stuck and I think that definitely was a huge great factor.

Annette appreciated the LA structured system and commented that, “Working through the levels is basically making sure you are complying with the requirements”.

Esther noted the work of the support officer; the impact of the individual professionals working for the LA was a recurring theme. Inconsistencies were frequently mentioned, Gloria describing it as “a bit hit and miss...we have suffered a little bit through the changes in personnel”, and so support has appeared to depend upon the individual officer. Recent cut-backs have brought about further unpredictability.

Leah explained how, as a representative on an early years forum she learns about “everything that’s up and coming for this county council...then...feed it back to our local network group”.

Networks were generally regarded as being valuable sources of support; however, there was a scathing comment concerning the lack of support in one LA: “I mean, this is the only county that hasn’t had a childminding network!” Networks are organised differently in LAs and for some, membership is the means through which childminders are able to draw down Early Years Entitlement Funding. Some were able to access additional support through training and regular visits from network co-ordinators, many of whom were highly regarded by respondents. Esther noted, “I think that her knowledge and understanding and quality of work has helped me to keep my standards up”. There were childminders who were sceptical about the worth of the networks to begin with but now recognised the support available, Samantha commented:

Definitely being on the network helped; when it first started up I wouldn’t have said so much. Now...I do know that if I had a problem if I phoned my network Co-ordinator, she would be as helpful as she could be, so you’ve always got that support on the end of the phone.

For several childminders the network is part of the LA quality assurance scheme and had greatly influenced their practice and provision. Attendance at a specified number of hours training each year was required; Rachael appreciated the benefit stating, “Using the network has definitely got me to where I am I think”. Louise had found the LA officers receptive to needs explaining, “They ask at one meeting what people would like at the next meeting. Everyone has different opinions but they try to fit in what people want”.

Networks offer the opportunity to meet with other childminders which Pamela appreciated, as “being a childminder you are isolated, you don’t have anybody to share things with”. Reflecting on the support she has gained, Lydia said, “If...you weren’t in the network... I think it would be so tough”.

Elissa who is undertaking research for her degree, is demonstrating the value she has gained from network membership by proactively encouraging others to join by examining:

The benefits of network groups for lone workers. There are 17 childminders in this town and only five of us attend a network group and we all tend to have 'good' or 'outstanding' and everybody who doesn't attend the group have 'satisfactory' so I'm trying to get them to attend the group to improve their practice and assessing the difference on them if they attend.

The impact of network membership on her ability to assume professional responsibilities was described by Lydia as "giving me that extra encouragement and support and giving me confidence to go out there and work with other practitioners and deal with other people, Social Workers, and CAF meetings and things like that". Similarly, Cheryl explained:

I felt like the network did help me quite a lot. I got quite close to a couple of ladies who worked alongside with me and helped me because sometimes I got a little bit nervous about, you know, making sure everything was alright and I felt that the network was pretty good.

As an 'outstanding' childminder, Jenna is "part of a network [and] I also mentor new childminders as they are coming in. So I also provide support". Childminders who had worked as mentors had found it a nurturing experience and developed confidence in their ability to articulate the rationale behind their practice as they advised new practitioners. It was seen as a two way process - Jessica told me, "I'm going to go round and see one tomorrow, she wants to talk about policies and things so I'll be helping her and I am sure she'll be giving me ideas as well".

Local children's centres featured in the support some childminders found useful; Gloria finds they "have provided support in terms of providing a venue to go to and activities you can take your children to". She mentions "a childminder drop in service [which] was an opportunity to get together" and was funded by the LA. The presence of a strong EYP based in the centre meant the facility was likely to be used as originally intended, although not

always the case as Hannah observed, “We’ve got an EYP at Children’s Centre but for some reason she doesn’t visit the settings – I thought that was the job so some of it’s good, some of it not so good as far as support goes”. Despite one of the aims of children’s centres being to provide a hub for childminders, this did not appear to be always the case. Eleanor was frustrated as the local centre was frequently unavailable, instead being used “for council meetings, nothing to do with children”. In an isolated rural area where there are limited facilities to meet, Eleanor said when “the weather’s half decent, you are out and about, plenty of places to go but in the winter it can be a really long winter”. In other LAs, both Pamela and Tess were concerned because they and other childminders are now unable to meet in their local recently built children’s centres, Pamela for no apparent reason and Tess explaining, “Something to do with the caretaker can’t have the keys at all times”. Unable to use the centre, childminders find other places such as a garden centre Tess had visited that day. In such venues, childminders encounter difficulties that mothers with two or three young children would not experience and this issue is seen as a frustration.

Childminders recognised the problems that living in rural locations created and accepted this presented LAs with difficulties. Jemima observed, “There are great swathes of the county which are populated, but very sparsely. And so provision and providing support across a county like that is actually quite difficult for the Local Authority”. Samantha understood the huge demands placed upon the LA officers when trying to undertake setting visits, “I’m not quite sure how they’re going to manage it”. Leni, in the same area, described the distances the officer needed to travel to support childminders and recognised that travelling time took a lot of hours out of the allocation given by the LA to do the job.

5.9.i.d. Support from other practitioners.

When asked about support they had received from other practitioners, the majority of interviewees were emphatic that other childminders and

professionals were an important element, reflecting Fauth et al. (2011, p.43). There were, however, some issues that proved awkward between childminders that will be mentioned first. Maria explained as childminders are independent businesses, “It’s very competitive, the business side of it. Within the network we do attend but there’s always that competitive edge”. Other childminders had received upsetting reaction; Esther said:

I feel that other childminders are a bit funny towards me because of my ‘outstanding’; especially other ladies that have done the OU with me...There’s always a little bit of unsaid gripe because I got an ‘outstanding’ and they didn’t...I overhear conversations and they’re planning days out or they’re going to have a Christmas party and I am not invited and it’s little things like that, which is sad.

Donna not only felt that people treated her differently once she gained her ‘outstanding’ judgement, “It was in the newspaper and it was like everybody hated me, people stopped speaking to me, when I walked into a room they all looked at me”, but there is additional pressure of having to maintain the standard yet with no guarantee of consistency of inspection as has been described earlier. “I am very nervous about my next inspection, because I feel like when you’ve got ‘outstanding’, you have to prove yourself even more. And I am worried about that, terribly”; Cheryl’s concern reflects comments of other practitioners.

There were a number of childminders who practised with others and found strength in the support it offered. Working with two other childminders, Jemima explained:

I think the major thing that helped us achieve ‘outstanding’ was the fact that we aren’t working alone; that there are three of us with very complementary strengths and I think that allows us to provide the children with a very calm but creative and positive environment. And I do honestly think the idea of childminders clustering together – not to create a nursery - but to maintain that unique home from home aspect that children get from childminders...I think it’s a real strength-giving thing, It provides you with confidence, it means that you never feel exposed, you can take advice. That’s the really positive aspect and I would say to everybody, find somebody to work with – it’s great.

Ten respondents said they had relatively little or no support from other childminders or professionals; however, the majority valued the relationships with other practitioners. Meeting other childminders is important, Joyce explained, “It can be quite a lonely job in that you are at home on your own and you’re just working with the children” and echoed by Libby who said it “can be a very lonely business unless you’ve got other friends that are like-minded”. Lindsey has one colleague with whom she works:

...really closely with another childminder who lives locally. Each month we have a planning meeting, we decide all sorts of things, what activities we are going to do with the children, and then when we’ve gone our separate ways, I do an individual plan for how I’m going to incorporate the needs of the children in my care into these activities that we’re doing, and that includes things at home as well as going to these playgroups and activity centres.

Some meet at organised groups, whilst others have made arrangements between themselves. The informal group to which Sally belongs and welcomes all new childminders, is integral to her provision:

We meet once a month for the childminding group – we’re a very, very strong childminding group in the area. We’re all friends – we socialise, there’s about 12 of us – we put on different things so I meet up every day with other childminders...Once [someone] becomes a childminder if they want to join we send out newsletters; if there is a new childminder a newsletter is sent to them to tell them the things we organise during the year, outings that we are going to do...We do it all ourselves.

Leah travels to a nearby town to meet informally and share “any concerns. We chat among each other – fees and prices and all things like that. And with Ofsted as well; we bounce ideas off each other”. Practical help is also offered, as Samantha explained:

I go to a childminding group in a nearby town, there’s five of us; well there are more than four ladies there, but I think a lot of my good work is down to them. We support each other, we give each other help and advice and actually the other ladies, if one of them is on holiday or something, they actually will look after each other’s children, so for them it’s even better. I am about 14 miles away from them so it wouldn’t work, but my trip once a week to the childminding group in that town is definitely my saving grace!

Other practitioners' expertise is valued. Beverley said, "Some of the women have been minding 25–30 years, they've got a huge amount of experience and wealth of knowledge to share; they've been very inspirational... they've inspired me to do what I am doing today". Merryn described the sharing of practice with her close colleagues:

I think it really helps to have other points of view, to observe other practitioners, to visit their settings, and that gives you an opportunity to gather information quite openly. It is important to be able to see evidence of good practice and also it does show you bad practice on occasion. It does help you to reflect most definitely; I find it quite valuable.

Donna described practical benefits:

We swap toys over so the kids are not getting bored of the same toys. It gives them a broader horizon...we share things, whereas in a nursery they can buy new things whereas it would cost us like – well the kitchen I'm looking at now would cost us £120; it's not like we can buy lots of different things all the time, so we swap things. Or if we're doing a theme about something we get together and buy it in bulk and split it.

Lydia explained how meeting regularly enables childminders not only to seek advice from each other, but also to disseminate learning gained from courses and distribute any hand-outs they had been given. Other support is willingly offered, "I've been looking at some block play training and the shop has got some beautiful books out on using natural resources...so I rang up yesterday afternoon and ordered four books so I've got some...that's how we work".

Childminders use this informal network to help each other accommodate families' care arrangements if one childminder has insufficient space until such a time a place becomes available. This arrangement suggests that even though each childminder runs a lone business, there is great trust amongst practitioners, reflecting Greener's (2009) childminding entrepreneurship. Libby, reflected upon support she receives and gives:

We have a really good childminding group here, there are quite a few who are really enthusiastic and I think when you are enthusiastic you

feed off one another...So I would say that was probably **the** most important factor, having others.

Some childminders were part of or had developed informal groups that have been instrumental in delivering training to local practitioners. Josephine works with others:

I am in a network that we have set up in the town; a group of us meet once a month, it's just an informal thing but it gives support and we do support each other. I provide training here at the setting for that group of people and other childminders so yes, the practitioners are a help...It's open to anyone.

Felicity described the group she is involved with in a county with no LA networks:

I run a childminding group and it is a very proactive group. It's one of the best ones I've been told in this county at the moment. We work together; we have regular meetings with the children; we have regular meetings without the children. I've organised different speakers to come in... One of the childminders was looking at a visual timetable. I've got the things together and I'm going to do that with them on Wednesday. The children's centre has allowed us to use their facilities for free.

These findings confound previous research (JRF, 2001) and evidences Siraj-Blatchford et al.'s (2002) assertion that, "Pursuit of knowledge and training appeared to stem from individual attitude and traits" (p.105).

Meeting regularly did afford LA officers the opportunity for informal contact; June explained that there is a "drop-in about 11 miles from here every week...very often the support lady will drop in there". This, however, was the only record of informal support from the LA; two childminders mentioned that they felt the non-attendance of support officers at their groups was a wasted opportunity, especially in large rural LAs where travelling to individual settings involved a huge time commitment. There were some childminders who mentioned the valuable contact with other local PVI settings as well as schools. Louise is involved with both:

I was on the fund-raising committee at the preschool so I do have contact with the preschool as well. Going in there helps me get ideas; you can see how well they set up areas. I also help at the Primary School in the Foundation Stage, it's nice to be able to share their ideas and pick up different tips along the way; more experience in bigger settings.

Childminders reported liaising with other settings their minded children attended and the doors this can open. Selina who is studying an Open University course has another childminder as a 'study buddy', gaining mutual support:

I link with the village preschool because we share a couple of the children, so we get together every so often with the relevant key workers and we discuss the children that we share. And that's quite nice because it leads to other things being discussed as well...I also link quite closely with the reception class teacher in the school because of the transitions and also because we share the same children. It's nice if I can find out what topics they are doing and other things of interest from the school. I get newsletters and all sorts of other information from the school and I also know what topics each of the classes are covering...I may or may not do anything with it but if a child comes and starts talking about a subject at least I know what they are doing at school and how I can be helping them.

Living in a very rural village Chloe has forged links with the local school and has become involved in events run by local schools explaining, "They have rural cluster groups, where lots of the rural schools get together, and they would involve me in those, with particular aspects; that was quite helpful". Living in an isolated situation, Hannah has been able to access training available to all early years practitioners in her area.

Caroline had developed knowledge and skills by volunteering at a local preschool as treasurer and helper; "It certainly gave me a lot of knowledge of how things worked". Similarly, Gloria has "picked up lots of good practice from ... working alongside, volunteering with some of the local preschools", acknowledging the quality therein.

Childminders stated how valuable they have found internet forums, particularly those specifically for childminders. Tanya reported how this has been used as a way of trying to make contact with new childminders in the area to encourage them to attend local groups. Donna explained how, when a new childminder, she was able to ask questions that she felt unable to ask elsewhere and found the responses she received invaluable: “Without that forum I would have been lost...because you get so much support from them – they’re all in the same boat, we all understand. There was no support and then I found them and it was ‘Oh, yes!’”. Jenna explained how internet support was being introduced into her LA. NCMA (2011) found 72% of respondents used the internet for childminding purposes across the whole of the country. However, as noted in Chapter One, 25% of rural areas have no or slow broadband which potentially restricts access.

5.9.i.e. Other sources of support.

Practitioners work from their own homes, consequently their business impacts upon their own families; several childminders recognised that family support had contributed significantly to their successful work and ‘outstanding’ judgements. Hannah acknowledged the detrimental effect childminding could potentially have:

I think it’s really key that ... it has to work for your family, because if it does it can work really well; if it doesn’t, you can create tensions you don’t need and you wouldn’t be providing the service as well because you would feel like it was upsetting everyone else in the family because you were doing it.

Childminders mentioned the practical and emotional support they receive from partners. Beverley is helped by her husband:

I am very fortunate that my husband is ... very supportive of what I do both hands on helping with administrative side of it; putting policies and procedures together. He does my accounts as well so I am very fortunate in that respect...he is very tolerant of the fact that you’ve got all these children coming and going in our home with all the posters and toys and resources and equipment stuff that we wouldn’t have had long ago because my children are much older now.

Polly recognises the contribution of family to her 'outstanding' judgement, comparing her situation to that of other childminders:

The major thing that helps me to provide what I've got to be honest, is having a very supportive family. I don't think you can be a successful childminder if you haven't got a supportive partner or husband and or children. Because I have worked, before now, seven days a week; I've done community childminding where I've worked some really long hours with social services and that does impact on your family life. My husband comes home from work about half past four each day and obviously coming home at that time of day walks straight into seven or eight children sometimes and if he wasn't completely supportive of it...I have heard instances of other childminders where they've voiced the fact that their husband is not very happy, wants to come in from work and it be nice and peaceful. So I definitely wouldn't be able to do an 'outstanding', I don't think, without my husband's support.

Family have supported in unexpected ways - Sadie was in the situation where, "Having had a daughter who has just done Early Years Childhood Studies and just done her EYP has kept me up to date...which can be fun!"

Some childminders acknowledged they worked in privileged circumstances. Mary, as well as noting her husband's support recognised his knowledge. "We both met when we both worked with in child development so we are both aware of risk assessment and things like this...I'm fortunate to have such a nice home for the children to come to as well". Whilst some childminders were aware that some practitioners have 'non-helpful' parents, described as such by Samantha, several childminders stated that parental feedback supports their work. Sonia said, "I have always had a good deal of support from parents of the children I look after and their appreciation of my work has always inspired me to work harder for their children". The confidence building brought about by appreciation of parents was noted by Leni, "Getting a good feedback from parents ... gives you more confidence to continue and progress with how you're working".

Maddy thought that successful childminding develops practitioners' confidence, and echoed several childminders' stories of feeling they had failed in school but by gradually developing confidence, knowledge and

expertise through training and self-evaluation, have since achieved. “I hadn’t reached any potential at school, I think for me the main drive was the enjoyment and need to succeed and be good at something I really enjoyed so the two really go together”. During a discussion of formal education, Bryony described her experience:

My spelling was dreadful but helping the children with their phonics now I’m brilliant and we get on really well, but then it helps me; it sounds silly – it might to you – I absolutely love helping the children learn. I had such a bad time at school and could not wait to leave, I was 15 on the Tuesday and I left on the Friday and I had a job to go to. And that was my education.

Justine felt she had been fortunate to be supported by LA officers who “have faith in my ability...and...it does seem that I’m lucky, ...Someone is putting me in the right place to do the right thing”. The inspiration of initial NNEB training and the tutor’s expertise impacted upon Grace’s practice:

I had a very, very good tutor when I was training and her influence on me was second to none. She was so good at explaining why we had to do things. That has stood me in good stead for my own daughter as well as other children.

The NVQ assessor had greatly influenced Tanya’s work who “was very good. She certainly knew what she was talking about and gave me things to think about as time was going on”. Developing the ability to, “Self reflect, I think that’s quite important to be able to stand back and look at your setting and analyse what is happening – observe, analyse and make adjustments accordingly” was felt by Selina to have contributed to her ‘outstanding’ judgement.

Overwhelmingly, childminders identified their own personal character as being crucial to success, mentioning drive and always wanting to achieve their best. “I think it’s just the sort of person I am; I always want to achieve the best... I always attend the courses and put into practice what I’ve learnt,” Elissa stated, which links to Selina’s reflective comment and is echoed by Amy who had found, “CPD is a useful way of reflecting and improving

through identification of training needs”. Aware that judgements can change from inspection to inspection, Beverley noted:

The gauntlet was laid down that you can achieve a ‘good’ or an ‘outstanding’ and I aim for the ‘outstanding’, didn’t even stop to look at what the ‘good’ enabled, I was after the ‘outstanding’...I have found over the last two-and-a-half to three years that maintaining that high level is sometimes trickier than achieving it in the first place.

Paige identified researching on the internet as being important to developing knowledge, also mentioned by Connie who subscribes to several professional magazines: “I just read, any information at all I can read”.

5.9.ii. Childminders’ rating of sources of support.

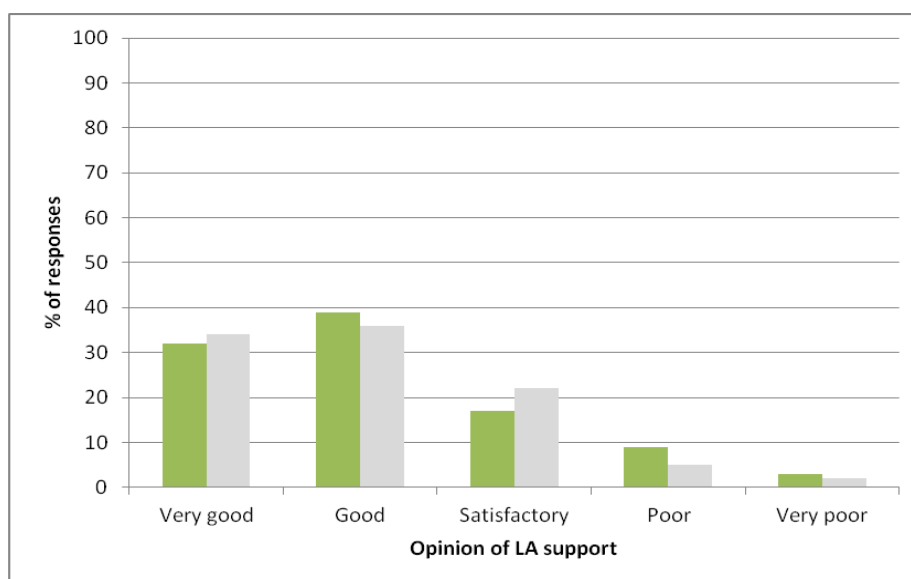
Childminders were then asked if they were able to rate the support they had received, using a Likert scale (Table 5.8). Support from other practitioners was again rated as the most important to childminders.

Table 5.8 Support received by childminders.

	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very poor	No answer
LA support for gaining qualifications	17	23	9	4	1	1
LA support for training	17	23	9	4	1	1
LA advice and guidance	18	17	11	6	3	0
Support from other practitioners	27	17	7	2	0	2

NCMA (2011) reported opinions of LA support from respondents drawn from across all Ofsted judgements. A comparison was made between this study and NCMA (2011) findings by combining the first three rows of Table 5.8, and calculating the mean. The opinions of childminders in both studies were very similar, suggesting there was no preferential support offered to childminders achieving an ‘outstanding’ judgement (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8 Comparison of childminder and NCMA findings of LA support.



Key:

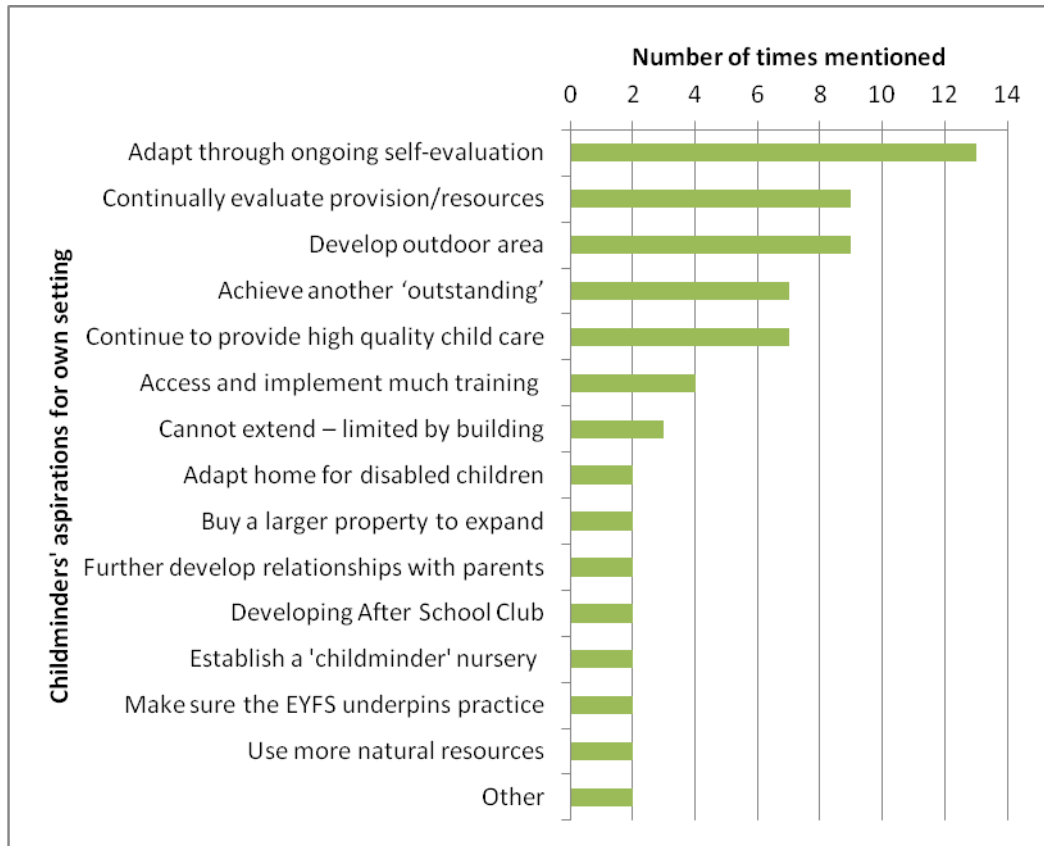
	Opinion of LA support from all childminders in this study.
	Opinion of LA support from childminders in the NCMA (2011) study.

5.10. CHILDMINDERS’ ASPIRATIONS.

5.10.i. Aspirations for the setting.

The majority of childminders, 45, suggested ways in which they would like to develop their practice and provision further (Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9 Childminders' aspirations for their setting.



Self-reflection was mentioned by the highest number of childminders; the desire to achieve a subsequent 'outstanding' judgement necessitates ongoing evaluation, as Maddy reiterated several times:

Thinking about where my weaknesses are and how to improve on them. There are always weaknesses no matter how well we think we are doing and the thing is not to get to the standard where we think we can't do any better, you can always do better. It's changing ideas, changing the environment, toys; I am continually changing stuff and thinking of new ideas and new places to go, just continually striving to give the best care you can. Even down to talking to you in the evening, we just can't get away from it. It's a vocation.

Several want to develop their settings; Alice thinking about the outdoor area:

I want improve the outdoor area and start the vegetable patch again this year...the children plant them, they water them and afterwards they harvest them and eat them. They did rainbow carrots last year and they were yellow and they all thought they were really good! The slugs had the lettuces but the runner beans came out alright though!

Childminders, inspired by the Forest School agenda, are planning to develop outdoor provision and their own expertise in this area. Jemima, who has extensive grounds, explained how she wants, “To be able to actually start a Forest School within the garden so that we can do lots and lots and lots outside”. She is aware of the need for children to have quiet moments and is developing a setting where the children can exercise autonomy.

Totally convinced that a home environment is the most appropriate environment for young children, there were some childminders who aspired to extend their provision. Merryn said:

My ideal would be to take my setting to a larger – well, it would have to be something like a house, and I would love to have a provision run by childminders, solely childminders, and to be able to offer a home environment, which I think is very important particularly for birth to three but also to have the real commitment that some of my colleagues and I have towards childcare provision, rather than a nursery setting where you perhaps have younger staff who aren't as experienced; I think there's a bit of a gap.

This echoed Maria's goal of, “Franchising the setting and see a whole network of settings exactly the same as this”. Other childminders would like to expand but are restricted either because of the size of their property or finance. Two childminders were negotiating with the local school to run an after school club as demand had outstripped the accommodation they could offer in their own homes.

The government initiative Every Child a Talker (DCSF, 2008e) was mentioned by several childminders during the interviews as was Forest Schools training. Elissa was inspired by what she had heard: “I've just been on an Every Child a Talker course; which has totally blown me away and I have come away with so many ideas, I would like to implement some of that at the moment”.

Building relationships with parents was mentioned by two of the more experienced childminders; the EYFS training had influenced Justine and had caused her to reflect upon her practice. Sinead, suggesting she had no great aspirations nonetheless sought to “keep continuing to care for the children I care for and making sure that I deliver the EYFS and that the students I have here and my assistants all learn a lot more about childminding or child development”. Other individual aims included Mary’s wish to accommodate a mother:

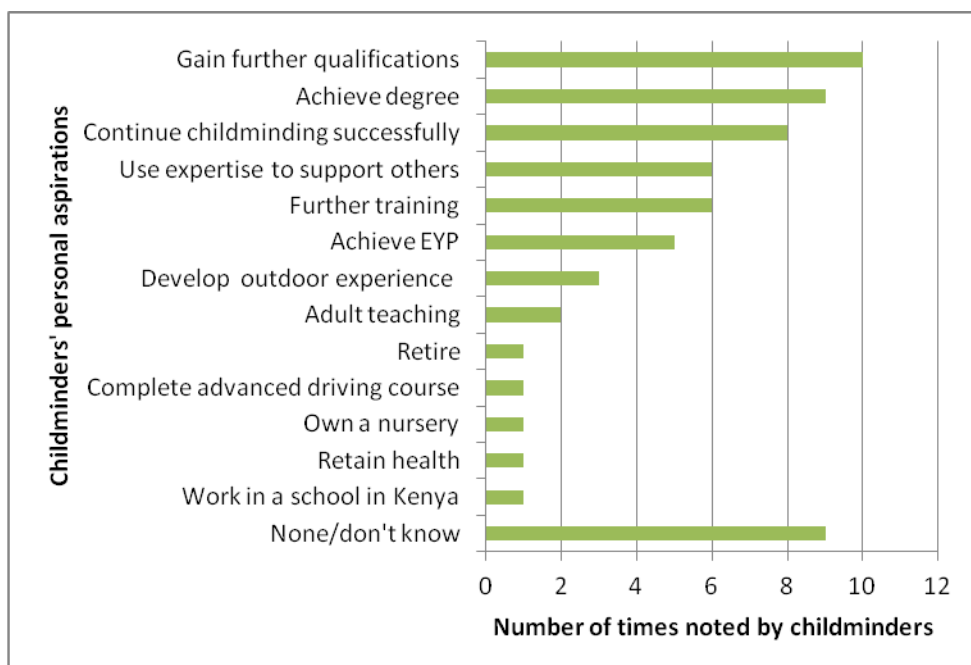
I’m hoping to get an extension. I’ve been approached by a lady with a child with cerebral palsy and I’d like to be able to take children in wheelchairs into my setting if I can but I’d need to improve my access.

Responses to this question were varied but most childminders articulated a wish to maintain the high standard they had already achieved.

5.10.ii. Personal aspirations.

The responses reflected a desire to continue with gaining deeper knowledge, understanding and expertise through further study (Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10 Childminders’ personal aspirations.



Childminders were appreciative of training opportunities. Justine explained her experience:

When I was younger, I wasn't in a social class that went to university. You did further education maybe; again I was in a rural home where farming and that type of life was what it was, so where I went was to continue in that vein, learning to cook, learning to manage, that type of thing. I wouldn't have ever gone to university. It's only through the opportunities with county with the funding and offering me the Early Years Foundation degree...so that's what I aim to do...a degree. I think, "Well maybe now I can do it", where in the past I wouldn't have considered it – it wasn't me.

Childminders do face a dilemma because additional qualifications, whilst increasing personal knowledge, may not ultimately make any difference to their business. As Carley noted, "We're self-employed so I can't give myself a promotion". Leni made a similar point. Some respondents are thinking about opportunities available outside childminding, though Merryn feels that in the present economic climate it is difficult to plan:

I wanted to work within Children's Centres, trying in some way to combine my experience and my degree working with families, I suppose possibly as a Development Worker, but the situation with the new government and lack of funding meant I could not afford to stop childminding and to develop my career in that sort of direction at the moment. It's all so uncertain.

The impact of government changes will be discussed in Section 5.14 as well as in the following chapters.

Jemima has two personal aspirations both of which will support her work with young children; she intends to take an advanced driving course because, "I feel that one of the best things that I could do to help protect them is make sure that my driving is the best it could be...one that is most valuable to the children's safety right now". The essence of Jemima's aim reflects concerns voiced by other childminders regarding children's safety in cars; as will be discussed later, cars are essential for people living in rural areas and so this is an important issue. Jemima explained her second aspiration:

I've decided to go and work in a school in a very poor part of Kenya in October. I am going to fly out and then go across and just spend some time there and hopefully I will learn more than I will ever imagine I will learn. I am very excited about it.

Jemima feels this experience will impact upon her childminding practice positively.

Childminders generally work alone; the long hours worked to accommodate parents' needs were discussed. The responsibility childminders feel that they have to ensure parents are able to meet their working commitments was clearly evident. Maria said, "It's hard enough for women to keep a job anyway and keep a career going, so I feel that's equally part of my job" and Bryony explained how, "The children are given a cooked meal before they go home in the evening so parents do not have to worry about that and can spend time with their children instead of having to make meals". Considering the needs of parents, Selina said:

If you are ill, unless you are very ill, you still have to work, you have to grin and bear it. Whereas some people can have a day off to recover, you are committed to your parents and the last thing you want to do is to let them down just because you feel under the weather.

Being 'there' for parents was seen as important and therefore Hannah's aspiration of "keeping fit and healthy" was said in relation to this aspect of the role as well as the need to be well enough to maintain a business.

5.11. REFLECTING ON THE JOB OF CHILDMINDING.

5.11.i. Frustrations of the childminding role.

Whilst the responses to this question were frequently preceded by light-hearted comments from interviewees, "Oh, loads!", "Plenty!", "How long have you got?" and "Has someone asked you to phone me? Actually you're such a brave woman asking that question!" the answers that followed were

carefully considered and participants explained and justified the issues that they felt caused concern. It was acknowledged that frustration could be dependent upon the time of the interview and the sort of day the childminder had experienced. The greatest concern was the general lack of understanding of the childminder role (Table 5.9).

Table 5.9 Frustrating aspects of the childminding role.

Aspect of frustration	Total
Lack of recognition/ understanding /amount of work	18
Paperwork	15
Not seen as professional	9
Ofsted – experience / inconsistency / regulations / inspectors’ attitude	9
Late pick up	8
Public perception of childminder	7
Home damage / intrusion	6
Training issues – timing, distance, lack of notice	6
Earnings	5
Looked down upon by other professionals	5
Push to become like nurseries	5
Childminder – the word	4
Constant government changes; MP’s portrayal of childminders	4
Home based so cannot walk away from the job	4
Isolation / loneliness	4
Lack of recognition of extent of family support given	4
Lack of recognition of qualifications gained	4
Parents’ differing expectations of children	4
Payment issues	4
Inequality of funding with nurseries and preschools	3
Lack of boundaries/taken for granted by parents	3
Working on own – managing behaviour; own ill health	3
Balance between own and minded children	2
Childminders’ own lack of professionalism	2
Funding cuts	2
Lack of LA support	2
Time	2
Children’s centres – not welcome	1
Inequality of SEN support to nurseries /preschools	1
LA paperwork duplicates Ofsted requirements	1
LA perceive childminders as an inferior provision	1
Lack of value of importance of the early years	1
No safety net when few children	1
Parents’ lack of valuing activities/children’s work	1

The responses reflect other studies (Fauth et al., 2011, p.42; Siraj-Blatchford, 2002, p.112). Although childminders are now included in the early years workforce having the same responsibility as other practitioners to deliver the EYFS, there are huge discrepancies between status, funding and recognition of the work done to meet the same requirements. In order for their inclusion in the early years structure to be viable, they are regarded as professionals, however, Leni summed up the problem, “No matter how much we are told that we are professionals, a lot of parents still treat us as glorified babysitters”. Maria’s comment reflected the feeling of many childminders, “I think you’re undervalued quite often, ‘You’re only a childminder’”. Comments such as these are upsetting, as Josephine states, “You’re supporting the most precious thing in a parent’s life so when people say you’re just a childminder I take umbrage”.

Childminding is often regarded as a stop-gap occupation until such times a mother can return to the recognised workforce, as Merryn said, “There’s still that thing that we’re just housewives making a bit of pin money and not really doing a *proper* job, which is really frustrating”. Elissa demonstrates this clearly by recounting comments she has received, “Oh, a childminder, now your child’s gone to school, are you going to get a job?’ ‘Are you going to get a job?’ ‘Well, actually I have got a job’. People don’t see it as a job”. Mary’s observation of how childminders are perceived reflects the distress of many respondents:

You feel the stereotype of someone who sits around watching daytime TV, smoking fags and doing nothing really. I think the TV and media don’t actually help because often childminders are portrayed like that and I think like with anything it’s a stereotype...

Amy commented that, “There are some childminders who give the rest of us a bad name” and so, as Connie said you are not looked upon “as being a professional worker and I class myself as being a professional worker and obviously I’ve got the qualifications to prove that but they don’t see you like that at all”. Jenna’s comment with which I began this chapter, “There are still

people that see me in the playground and say ‘Oh, it’s just the lady with the pram’”, belies the fact that she has earned a degree and is a well-qualified, experienced professional. Mary suggested that one reason is that there are “misconceptions about my job because it is a predominantly female occupation and low paid in comparison to a lot of work; and I think perhaps the respect is not there”. Income is discussed later in this section.

There was frustration that other practitioners within the education system are equally dismissive of the work they do. Elissa who is undertaking a degree said, “My peer group who came from nurseries could not believe childminding was run in the same way as a nursery was, that childminders were run with the EYFS”. Some of those who do know of the requirements childminders have to meet feel childminders provide a deficit service, as Josephine explained, “Nurseries and other settings, depending who’s running them, do not think that you are providing a service as good as them”. Maria said, “Teachers think - it’s not as bad as used to be - but they do look at you as if you are not doing a valid job”. The apparent lack of trust and recognition offered other professionals and frustration it causes was shown by Jenna’s experience:

I actually at one point had to take my portfolio into preschool and show it to them because they didn’t actually know what I was registered for, what qualifications I had, what training I’ve done. You can hear them talking about you and you think ‘Do you actually realise what I’m qualified to do?’ I arranged to go into preschool and show them. In fact they come and approach me if they have a query now.

Mary articulated the problem that has perpetuated the stereotypical view and the perception of the role of an early years educator:

I feel a lack of respect for minders and lack of respect for children actually because sometimes people don’t realise how important the early years are and how important to a child’s development and their own personal potential to have good care in the early years from birth. I really believe it is from the day that they are born to seven at least. Well obviously ongoing all through their life but it’s very, very important for the early years. And I don’t think people give that sort of thing enough credit and childminders seem to be down very low on the list of highly respected professions.

Childminders identified parents, professionals and the public as holding unwarranted opinions; of greater concern is that the unmerited views are shared by influential policy makers as Alice noted, “I know recently one of the MPs was saying that childminders were inexperienced, uneducated to implement the EYFS”.

The ways in which childminders are viewed impacts upon support and business. The inequality between the support that early years practitioners receive from their LA was a frustration for some. Financially there are differences and consequently as Leah explained that:

An uneven playing field has come about through being on the three and four year old funding, for example a nursery setting gets a laptop and they get £1000 outdoor funding and all sorts of things though as a childminder you don't get. And they obviously get really good advertising whereas a childminder doesn't.

Samantha, who is accredited and is able to draw down government Early Years Funding, said, “Childminders are not automatically sent the same resources as the schools and the nurseries are” and made the point that, “We are expected to do with the children the same as nurseries and schools are doing; they got sent this [Letters and Sounds] booklet – childminders weren't even told about it”. Echoing Leah's frustration, Samantha recounted an outdoor project she had proposed costing a maximum of £500 and, having reached the short listing stage after going on outdoor training to access the funds, was told:

‘This is absolutely fantastic but it isn't going to cost enough’ so I didn't get... [the LA officer] took my planning booklet away with her and lost it - which I was really gutted about but I've got over that one now - because she wanted to show it to other people and then she actually lost it and I didn't get funding because it wasn't going to cost enough.

Reading in the papers some time later of a nursery setting that had received their £33,000 grant Samantha reflected, “You are considered too small and that's telling you that you are not as important as other people.” Another example of inequality was identified by Esther who said, “I don't feel that I

was given a support that a preschool would be given” when discussing the special educational needs of a child in her setting explaining that, “The teacher who goes into preschools to help co-ordinate learning etc.... they don’t go into childminders’ homes.”

Training was a frustration for several reasons; the timing of sessions frequently did not take into account the fact that childminders cannot meet at six o’clock as children are often not collected until that time or later and little consideration was made for travelling time. Some training was only available during the day, Amy commenting, “If we want decent training we have to take day off unpaid, which is not an option at all”. The lack of understanding of decisions taken or comments made by LA officers reflected ignorance of the childminding role. Lack of notice of courses did not take into account the disruption to parents of suddenly having no childcare. Amy gave an example; “We received an email last Thursday offering some CAF training, during the day on the following Wednesday. That is just not possible to arrange at such short notice!” The financial implications for childminders did not appear to be understood; Carley explained, “The council would [put training] on during the working week, which is no good for us because for us to take a day off costs us a lot of money. Obviously we can’t work if there’s a training course”.

There were situations that raised problems for some; parents arriving after the arranged pick-up time, as had happened to June on the evening we spoke, “I was supposed to finish tonight at five-thirty but four were late going and it was six-fifteen before I finished.” Another example from the evening prior to our interview was given by Bryony:

It should have been a quarter past five pick-up. As it was I think it was quarter to eight. And I think, ‘Oh, gee’. They should have come in on Monday to sleep Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, pick-up after tea on Thursday. Then she phoned me on Saturday at half past eight saying she’s got a nine o’clock flight in Gatwick so can the girls sleep Sunday night. So that was an extra night that we weren’t expecting but because we’re here I just feel we’re taken for granted. No, I’m

here and I feel that because I live on the premises, they do tend to take advantage of that and whether that is the norm with other childminders, I don't know.

The fact the childminder would not be leaving the premises as a nursery practitioner would indicate being taken advantage of. The empathy childminders feel for and concern about the whole family and the dilemma it presents is clearly identified by Chloe:

When you have families that are under stress, and I don't necessarily mean big stress, it could just be working hard and trying to fit in all the Christmas shopping; sometimes you are at the bottom of the chain a little bit. You can be put on and it's maintaining the balance between being flexible and understanding, but still maintaining a professional stance and actually realising it is alright to say no or not to be OK about them being very late to pick up their children.

Maintaining professionalism is ongoing, as Selina explained, "You do get those text messages and phone calls, 'I'm sorry I realise it's Sunday evening but I forgot to let you know...' You have to keep reminding them of the boundaries".

Sophia noted childminders "work hard for very little money"; days are long and with no breaks away from the children, as in other settings. Childminders have policies that structure contracts with parents, however, as with timing, the payment of fees cause difficulties (Penn, 2012). June notes that some "don't pay you for quite a while, even though I've got a payment policy. I do remind them of it now and again". Similarly Lindsey has payment terms set out clearly but instances have occurred when parents "turn up 'Oh, I haven't been to the bank can I drop it down later?' But they don't mean later in the day, it's actually two days later". The lack of appreciation of childminders and the fact that childminding is a business, income from which is important to the family is eloquently expressed by Pamela:

It doesn't matter how much publicity childminders get, we are still seen by a lot of people as just babysitters. At the end of the day, parents don't want to pay us; they pay their cleaners more than us. Although I've got some very nice parents, they think nothing of paying their cleaners £7 an hour but they'd have a heart attack if I charged them that! Yet their child is their most treasured possession!

The issue of financial reward exposed a discrepancy in Early Years Entitlement funding between LAs. Further research established that the current amount paid by rural LAs vary enormously from £3.10 to £6.50 per hour, the latter having been reduced from £8.56 in April 2012 (Table 5.10).

Table 5.10 Hourly rate of Early Years Entitlement Funding.

Hourly rate of Early Years Entitlement Funding	Additional information
£3.85	There is additional funding if more flexibility is available.
£3.45 – £3.53	Dependent on area of deprivation.
£3.19 - £3.99	Dependent on quality framework and area of deprivation
£3.98	
£3.70	Same rate for all providers.
£3.62	Settings and childminders.
£3.40	Basic amount and other factors give slightly more.
£4.85	For all funded sessions including 2 year olds.
£3.80	Depending on combination of hours that can be offered; area of deprivation etc.
Not at the moment	Being piloted - £3.52 in nurseries.
£5.06	2 year old funding - £4.85
£5.45	
Not at the moment.	None are able to draw funding at present; some 'outstanding' childminders are currently being trained. No figures available for amount to be paid.
£3.97 (average).	Based on qualifications (must be L3); Quality Improvement, policies in place, including Equal Opportunities; advised to do SEN training.
£3.24	Basic amount with few additional pence for highest quality rating; deprivation and rurality.
£3.17	
£4.13 - £4.39. £4.85 for 2 yr old pilot.	Area of deprivation; number of settings in area.
L3 - £3.10; L2 - £3.30 L5/6: £3.50; QTS/EYP: £3.70	As long as a childminder has at least one funded child per term the childminder would also receive a block allowance of £72 for the term on top of the hourly rate.
£8.56 - £6.67	To be decreased to £6.50 from 1 st April, 2012.

Comparing these figures to the UK minimum wage of £6.08 per hour, the rate for workers aged 21 and over, all LAs except one pay less than this

hourly rate and the majority pay less than the minimum for 18 to 20 year olds. Additionally, two LAs do not have a system that allows childminders to draw down funding. These variations accentuate the disparity not only between early years practitioners within a single LA but also between childminders living in different LAs. The 'living wage' requirement for a rural area, £14.31 (JRF, 2012) highlights the paucity of funding. Andrea made links between income, the minimum wage and Pamela's earlier comment:

We're paid under the minimum wage and do long hours and we have a very, very, very responsible job because we've got peoples' most precious things that we look after. We have children and you're responsible for bringing them on whether you have them for an hour or 30 hours; you're responsible for caring for them and comforting them and giving them a bit of love. Not replacing their families, you know, keeping them going until they see their families again.

Childminders are reliant upon the income they make from their work but the unpredictability can cause anxiety (Penn, 2012; Bond and Kersey, 2002). Donna explained the impact of her minded children decreasing:

When you're busy it's excellent, but when it goes quiet...there's nothing to help you. You'd have to stop and go and get another job and there aren't many jobs up here because it is in the middle of nowhere. If I was single and I had to bring up three children, and it has gone from four children to one, I would be panicking now. There's no safety net at all. I mean you can borrow toys and things, but you can't, you know like, I need more things for the garden and there's eBay and stuff...but when you start to add things up, you think 'Well, that's a lot of money'. And I've only got one child so I only earn £3.70 an hour, so if I was a single woman on my own, it would be a case of 'Do I feed my child or do I buy a car for the outside?'

These difficulties resonate with NCMA (2011) findings; 16% of respondents reported their business make a loss.

Working within your own home can cause problems; damage was mentioned by some and Caroline said, "I think it would be quite nice if you do buy nice things not to worry is it going to get broken". Beverley said:

It's one uphill struggle trying to keep the place clean, tidy and things wear out very quickly. Obviously the wear and tear when you have got 12 pairs of wet feet going through your house each day is going to be greater than when you've just got a family of four.

Major adjustments have to be made as, “It does take over your home to some extent” Chloe said. Elissa noted the impact upon the whole family; “I have two teenage sons and they’ve both got cots in their bedrooms and that is frustrating”. Working within the home does mean that the setting cannot be walked away from; Sophia felt that you “can’t close the door and forget about your job because your job is at home” and there has to be a constant awareness to ensure requirements are met for example, “Because it’s in your own home you have to spend time tidying and cleaning and washing the floor; if I wasn’t childminding it could be left ‘til the next day”. Justine reflected that, “Maybe it would be nice to have a house that doesn’t look like a bomb site at times and just have a nice house to go home to!”

Paperwork was mentioned by 27% of childminders as a frustration and was seen as impinging upon time with the children; Caroline stated, “I think I want to be looking after the children, not worrying about catching up with this or catching up with that”. It was felt that the requirement discrepancy between LAs was unjust and the lack of co-ordination, indicating a lack of knowledge of Ofsted requirements, meant paperwork had to be duplicated for some LAs. Leni explained:

I find that whole system to be a complete duplication of the Ofsted inspection and I feel that perhaps they could find a system where if, according to your Ofsted inspection grade, they could just take more from that. I know it’s come out more in the Tickell Review that there should be less paperwork for the Local Authority, which I totally agree with, because at the moment our Network really requires more paperwork over and above what Ofsted require and I think it’s a complete waste of time.

Joyce, who had been a secretary, enjoys paperwork and has good office skills notes, “It does take a lot of hours outside of your childminding”. Working alone means all requirements have to be met by one person, which Pamela felt to be unreasonable commenting that what Ofsted “actually want us to do is exactly the same as nursery and playgroup do and a nursery and playgroup have two or three staff to do the paperwork” and where, Tess noted, jobs “can be delegated”. It was felt that some of the reasoning

behind requirements was irrational. Kirsten questioned the discrepancy in registering children, “For early years education children we have to have a full signature with the time of arrival and leaving whereas for every other child we are allowed to have just an initial”. These comments reflected Fauth et al.’s (2011) research which reported that childminders found the amount of paperwork generated by the EYFS to be the “most challenging” (p.45).

The importance of family support was discussed earlier. “Trying to meet the needs of my children and the needs of the childminding – I can’t always be in two places at once!” Marianne exclaimed. Childminders have to be aware of the feelings of their own children as Gloria explained, “Getting a balance between your own children and other children, I won’t say it’s hard but it needs consideration and it needs working at”. Samantha gave an example from the day we had spoken:

Sometimes I think that is my hardest thing is trying to sort my own children respecting their space and their wishes. Today I only picked my six year old son up from school and we didn’t have to drive to another school; on two days a week we pick up another little girl. I had two babies with me which he was quite happy about and he said ‘Do we have to pick up so and so?’ and I said ‘No’ and he was completely different. He was quite pleasant, quite jolly all the way home because he knew he didn’t have to go out again and I think sometimes it’s understanding your own children’s feelings towards it;... sometimes I say it’s tough luck because this is the way things are, whereas you would possibly spend more time if a childminding child had a problem with it and try to sort it out.

The responses childminders gave were sometimes coloured by the experiences of that particular day. Elissa explained eloquently why she had identified parents as a frustration:

I said the parents because a child was picked up 40 minutes late and the parent said what a terrible day she had just had, but she didn’t realise that her two children had been really hard work today. She gives no recognition and never thanks you for looking after her children – it’s very frustrating when you give your heart and home to these children and you are just a childminder to her.

Childminders can feel lonely and remote, as well as lacking in adult company. The NCMA was appreciated as providing independent and expert advice; Grace explaining that, “I am quite remote with regards to meeting other childminders, well anybody really. So I value the fact I’m an NCMA member, if I needed any legal advice or anything like that I’ve got the backing of the NCMA”. This reflects the vulnerability childminders feel.

The fact that childminders are independent practitioners is perceived as being unacknowledged by Ofsted; Jodie commented that, “I think that Ofsted should not compare us to nurseries, as I think they are expecting way too much from us and we are completely on our own”. The apparent closing of the gap between childminders and nurseries is regarded with suspicion and alarm by childminders, as Tess explained:

I often have said if we get up a petition, so many childminders and parents would actually say, ‘No, we don’t want all this. We want our children to be in a home environment not a nursery cum school; if we want them to be in that sort of environment we will send them there’.

During the interview period, proposals were being mooted at government level and are discussed in Section 5.14.

5.11.ii. Rewards of the childminding role.

The tone of voice immediately changed when childminders were asked about the rewards of the job (Table 5.11). The enthusiasm and commitment was clearly evident. There were 20% more responses to this question than the previous question; childminders were more positive than negative about their role. The huge importance childminders place on the opportunities to nurture children and build relationships with them and their families was evident. Annette commented, “One of the biggest things is the bond and relationship you build up with other families ... you do get really close to children and their families and I think that’s got to be one of the most rewarding things”.

Table 5.11 The rewarding aspects of the childminding role.

Rewards of childminding	Total
Watching children grow and develop	31
Knowing children are happy and/or safe	21
Knowing you have made a difference to a child's development	18
Building close relationships with children	17
Supporting and encouraging children's learning	16
Building close relationships with families	14
Young adults returning and showing appreciation	11
I love / enjoy my job	9
Appreciative parents	8
Getting to know children and family really well and supporting them through family crises	8
Babies – cuddles and creating lasting bonds	7
Flexibility	7
Being with children	6
Doing a worthwhile job	6
Made to feel valued	5
Parents going to work happy and relaxed	5
Working for yourself	5
Working with parents to overcome difficulties	5
At home for own family	4
Developing an extended family	4
Supporting children through the vital early years	4
Regarded as part of the community	3
Spontaneity	3
Creating foundations for the next generation	2
Making wonderful friends	2
Own children develop close friendships	2
Recognition by Ofsted	2
Enabling parents to work flexibly	1
Offering local work to an assistant	1
Potential of earning good money	1
Relationships amongst minded children forming 'family'	1
The structure of paperwork and regulations	1

There was an abundance of evidence showing childminders' commitment to helping children and parents. Forging close bonds with families who use the service for many years enables childminders to see the results of working closely together. Sinead explained:

Seeing the little changes that you make that makes life better for the children and some of the adults. Some of the adults and some of the parents have really struggled if they are single parents or teenage parents, so those sorts of things just make the job worthwhile.

The impact can be significant, such as that described by Kirsten:

Things you do have a direct input literally for the rest of those children's lives...that you can influence parents, change the way that they discipline or the way that they feed or the way that they manage. I had a parent that hit children and I now have a parent that reasons with children and I did that. That is amazing isn't it? You can't describe that!

Selina, echoed Annette's comment that knowing much more about individual families helps you with the children. When comparing her work to that of preschool practice she said:

Yes, in preschool you were not always aware – even if they were moving house they might not let you know, you might suddenly get 'I forgot to give you this last week'. As a childminder, as soon as they know they were moving, you know. It's much more personal, I think. As a childminder my knowledge of the families is more in-depth and up-to-date. You know what the children are going through at home, whatever that might be. I had to deal with the unexpected death of a parent; you do get to know not just the immediate family but the extended family as well. And that's part of job, that's part of what you are here for.

There were many accounts of enduring relationships. Samantha, described the rewards:

Meeting some wonderful friends! I've got a lot of my childminding children now have grown up and left school and been to university and I've got them on Facebook and it's, 'Hang on a minute I'm watching you!' They know that if at any point anything happened to them they can still come here and I would do what I could for them. That's what I think is really important, being there for people... and seeing them still now and they still know that they are important to me and I hope I am important to them really.

Children who had been cared for have rewarded childminders by recalling things that they experienced as children and had made a lasting impression, such as an encounter Jamie had:

I remember one – he's 22 – he came to the door not so long ago to bring my son some games back and he said, 'Do you still look after those little kids?' and he said, 'You used to make the best spaghetti on toast!

Maria had a similar experience. "To have a full grown man coming up to me and saying 'I remember you, you gave me sandwiches when I was a little kid and I was hungry', that is such a wonderful thing". The love and security that children have found so comforting is shown by Maddy:

...and the ones that come back that I'm not even paid to have. I've got one who comes back at the moment and is 14, she's back every night, she is an only child and gets lonely – it's just that really! Watching them grow up and knowing you've had a good part in that. It's quite an achievement.

The strong relationships forged between childminders' own children and minded children was valued, as Gloria said, "It's very rewarding to see your children have wonderful friendships with the children you look after". This was echoed by Alice who said, "The children love coming to the setting and are really good friends with my children and I think that's really quite rewarding in itself". Justine described how:

...children become part of a family and it's not my family...they become an interlinked family with each other. The friendships build – the friendships stay for years...my children are still looking out for each other when they're around the pubs - when they're bigger they still look out for each other.

Providing the environment in which young children can flourish was articulated by Libby:

To me it's having children coming in that perhaps weren't happy to begin with and then settled and you see them grow up to become very well rounded adults, teenagers. I had a boy from about 18 months who had gone from childminder to childminder because they couldn't control him and I had him until he was about 11 or 12 because I had his younger brothers too. He came to visit me when he left school with a bunch of flowers to say 'Thank you; I'd never have done this without you'. The rewards are seeing them grow up, staying in contact, it's that little thing – 'I love you'. The whole thing, knowing that you are giving that child the best possible care they could ever wish for – I give what I would expect to receive myself; I wouldn't expect any less for my own children.

The importance of an early practitioner's role was frequently mentioned, as Maria explained, "I think it's a worthwhile job you are actually creating the foundations of the next generation". The impact of the involvement a childminder can have was explained by Josephine:

I feel that the children are at their most vulnerable but the most vital part of their development is between birth and three or to five and beyond, and I think it's fantastic that you are able to support them and develop them and watch them – with their parents, with parents jointly supporting them, helping them develop as young human beings.

Childminders described the effect their work had on children's learning, such as Louise who said, "I just enjoy it, really enjoy it! I really love the learning – when you're encouraging them to question things – that's my favourite bit!" Jemima shares the same feelings. "I love...when you see those learning lights go on in a child when you've spent time with them and they start telling you about ... something that you've been working on and their face lights up; it's lovely".

Two childminders spoke of experiences of looking after children with additional needs. Leni described the huge responsibility:

I've also looked after a couple of children with Down's Syndrome and one of them I had from 12 weeks old and she was a very sickly baby with holes in her heart and I had to feed her through a gastric tube and everything; to think that a parent has trusted you, a complete stranger, with the care of their most precious thing in the world, is a huge reward. A job really well done.

Rachael explained her reward:

I've got one little boy at the moment who has Cerebral Palsy and I childminded his brother, and this little chap is only three but in five months he's gone from not being able to sit up to sitting up and bum-shuffling and when he smiles at me it makes me glad I do the job I do.

Working with a childminder colleague, Donna had recently taken her minded children on an excursion:

The reward is when you're sat on the train, looking at a child's face and he is absolutely mesmerised watching the sea go by. Or trying to speak and you give them something and they say 'Ta' back. They draw a smiley face on a picture and it's absolutely amazing and they've no idea what they've done and just being around them really. If I was a millionaire I would open up a nursery just for that fact because it's just one of the most rewarding jobs I've ever had.

Childminders frequently showed that they feel they had an honoured position, as Eleanor commented, "Just being part of watching them grow up – it's quite a privilege really". Esther, recognising she had an opportunity to be with young children when parents cannot, expressed empathy saying, "I think watching a child grow and flourish and being part of their early years is really precious. I feel guilty that I can experience these when parents are out at work". The huge responsibility that is entrusted to childminders was explained by Chloe, who said:

Knowing that you are looking after something as important as somebody's children and knowing that while you're looking after them those children are happy and well looked after and learning and going home at the end of the day having had a good day [is the reward].

As well as emotional rewards, childminders enjoyed a range of practical benefits in their role. Joyce explained, "We can pick and choose and do what we want to do – I think I enjoy that freedom". Several, Sylvia included, enjoyed, "Being your own boss" which enabled Annette, amongst others to "have the flexibility to take each day as it comes". Comparing her work to previous employment Chloe said:

Yes, you feel like you do a job that matters. Whereas I don't think I felt like that before, working in financial software it didn't really matter; it wasn't really that important – it could feel like it but it wasn't! Whereas this feels that it does matter.

Beverley considered achieving an 'outstanding' judgement reinforced the worth of the role, "You know it makes me feel good to think that I am getting a pat on the back...and Ofsted did that for me obviously with an 'outstanding'". Caroline said, "I was buzzing for weeks afterwards, because you know all the hard work has actually been recognised". Polly, again

comparing childminding to her last job, explained how feedback about her work is instantaneous:

I always say to people, I know when I have done my job right, right there and then, because the child has it on her face - I get the hugs, I get the smiles, I get the excitement, I get the children not wanting to go home with their parents. And parents being very thankful and being very appreciative of the extra mile that you will do. I don't have to wait for an appraisal every three months off my boss somewhere. It's just the slightest little thing, you know, a hug from a child who is not normally very demonstrative; children coming up to me on Valentine's Day and saying that they love me and, 'Happy Valentine's Day' – it makes me laugh but sometimes it almost draws me to tears you know - it's lovely, you know if you are doing your job right or not.

Sadly, achieving an 'outstanding' judgement was regarded by some childminders as an albatross, as Esther explained, "You didn't want to sing it from the roof tops and it is a big deal, you know, but you keep it to yourself a bit more because you don't want to upset anybody". Enforcing the view that it is something kept to oneself, Cheryl said, "When you are 'outstanding' they're like 'What makes you any better than us?'". Searches for 'outstanding' childminders had proved challenging and I could not understand why this had been so; interviews revealed why childminders were reluctant to advertise themselves as having achieved the judgement.

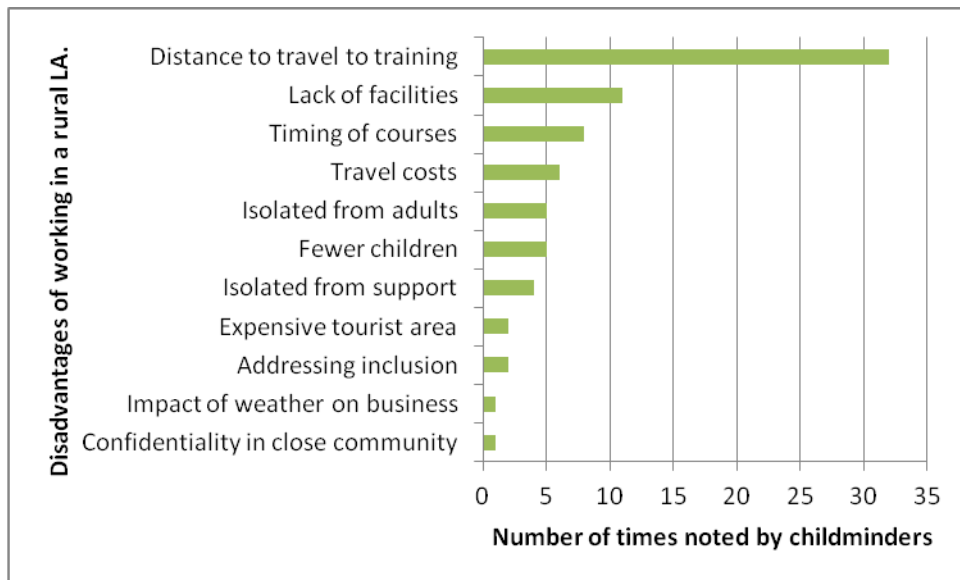
Summing up the advantages of her work, Sonia said, "I'm sure I laugh a lot more at work than other people do".

5.12. CHILDMINDING IN RURAL LAs.

5.12.i. Disadvantages of working within a rural LA.

Twelve childminders could see no disadvantage in working in a rural LA; however, seven of those had no other experience to make comparisons.

Figure 5.11 Disadvantages of working in a rural LA.



Concerns about travel (NCMA, 2011; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) whether it be distance to training, expense, public transport and impact of snow preventing parents getting to their setting was mentioned by 39 childminders (Figure 5.11). All childminders mentioning transport emphasised the need for access to a car; Sadie explained that, “One of the downsides here is always having to get in to the car to drive – that’s the biggest downside to wherever we go”. This has financial implications as June noted, “especially with diesel the price it is, just getting from one place to another and to meet other childminders and groups”. Most respondents seemed fortunate and had transport, however, Connie does not, “So I have to walk everywhere with them and if the weather’s really bad that can be pretty awful when we’ve got to walk to school”. Those with their own transport were empathetic towards childminders who had none, identifying difficulties. Annette said, “If you were very rural and down country lanes, there’s the safety aspect of walking down country lanes with children”. The financial impact was highlighted by Josephine, “I’m lucky, I can afford to put petrol in and travel, others can’t”. For those without, public transport is a problem. Elissa noted the lack of public transport and impact on accessing training, “It would be difficult as it’s all in the evening and the public transport in the evening would be harder”. Libby commented, “If you haven’t got a car then you’re stuck”.

Training can be difficult for many, timing, travelling and weather conditions presenting problems (NCMA, 2011). Tanya explained:

We do have some issues with training as they will put them on 30 miles away as well. It is quite common they will put them on in the county town and when you've been working a ten hour shift the last thing you want to do is to add on 30 miles driving each way to attend a training session.

There appears to be a lack of understanding by LA officers of the problems that the arrangements they make can pose, as Kirsten said:

People would say, 'SENCO training is on in another town, why don't you go there?' 'It's a two hour drive from here'. 'Oh, don't be silly, it's only 50 miles'. It may be 50 miles but it is a two hour drive from here.

Reflecting on the planning for training, Donna suggested:

I think whoever sets up this training doesn't realise how far places are apart. They just put a pin in a map and say 'I'll have it there'. But some childminders don't drive, so how are they, apart from grovel a lift with their friend, how are they supposed to get anywhere?

Rural journeys can cause anxiety. Tanya described a harrowing journey during treacherous weather conditions to a training meeting and said travelling alone along lonely country roads at night could present problems. Polly explained that at times she travels about 20 miles alone across open National Park countryside at night to training.

Bad weather that makes travelling difficult impacts upon parents and this can affect the business. Sophia explained the dilemma she faces when parents are cut off because of heavy snow fall and cannot bring the children to her setting, "That can be a disadvantage when children and parents can't reach you; you debate as to whether you charge them for not coming when they cannot get to you or are you out of pocket?"

Isolation can mean a lack of other adults, children, or facilities. Eleanor described this vividly:

Even to a certain extent being out and about – in winter I could walk to the school without meeting anybody. In an urban area, if you were out walking or going on a bus or going on a train you are in with a big mix of people, seeing them, listening to them, whereas here, we could go for a walk in the middle of winter and not bump into anybody.

Echoing this, Jamie said, “It can be quite lonely as well in that you don’t get to see adults or have adult conversation because you are so busy”. Sophia regretted, “Not having the chance to mix with other childminders”. She also explained that there were no local toddler or play groups that would offer the opportunity for both adults and children to meet. Sally suggested that, “In a town I bet there would be more things to take the children to, more drop-in centres perhaps”. Donna has to go ten miles to a group and felt that there appeared to be more facilities in urban areas, commenting, “They have a lot of funding in the larger town whereas up here they don’t, it’s like we’re the forgotten few”. Facilities in some rural areas were expensive; Sally who lives in a tourist area of outstanding natural beauty said, “Some are very expensive to go to, we can’t take all of the children there”. Some childminders take children out and about but as travel is expensive Sinead explained:

There is the cost involved in that although obviously we are charging parents, you know it’s very hard to charge anybody...childcare is always so expensive for some people, especially if they are working the full week to then say, ‘I need another £5 here or another this to go into the county town to see...’ so that all comes out of my cost.

Isolation can affect business; Leah commented on the “scarcity of the children – because there aren’t as many houses – that’s probably the main disadvantage” and Paige reflected that, “It has taken me longer to build up my business”. Both Joyce and Tanya thought there would be more work available for childminders in urban areas. Conversely, the lack of access to facilities meant that settings were “quite isolated from all the support services” as Chloe noted, with Leni considering, “It would be easier in a town environment with access to the Co-ordinators, Centres and everything is

more immediate". Jemima recognised it is a difficult situation for the LA officers because of the distances and thought, "The big one is the lack of support when you first start, when you're in your home because the development workers just can't get around everybody and they don't have the resources themselves to do it".

Two childminders thought that isolation restricted opportunities for inclusion. Selina recognised that:

The children I care for don't get the same opportunity to get to mix with more ethnic groups, others with disabilities, the whole range really – they're a little bit more isolated. You have to think that much harder of making them aware of inclusion and multi-culture and everything that goes with it. I don't want multi-cultural awareness and acceptance to be offered just by way of tokenism so I do have to look at ways of raising children's understanding and acceptance in all areas of inclusion.

Mary felt that a lack of awareness of equal opportunities was a topic that needed more consideration in rural areas. "It is quite a traditional place and perhaps, I don't really know the words to describe it, perhaps people – well they've not been used to so many different people really". Having had very different life experiences to other childminders in the area she recognises many have not been away from the district and met the range of people she knew, thus she felt childminders needed good training to develop knowledge and confidence to challenge discrimination. "I often despair at the training for equal opportunities because it seems to be 'ticky box' stuff and people are really not understanding why it is important".

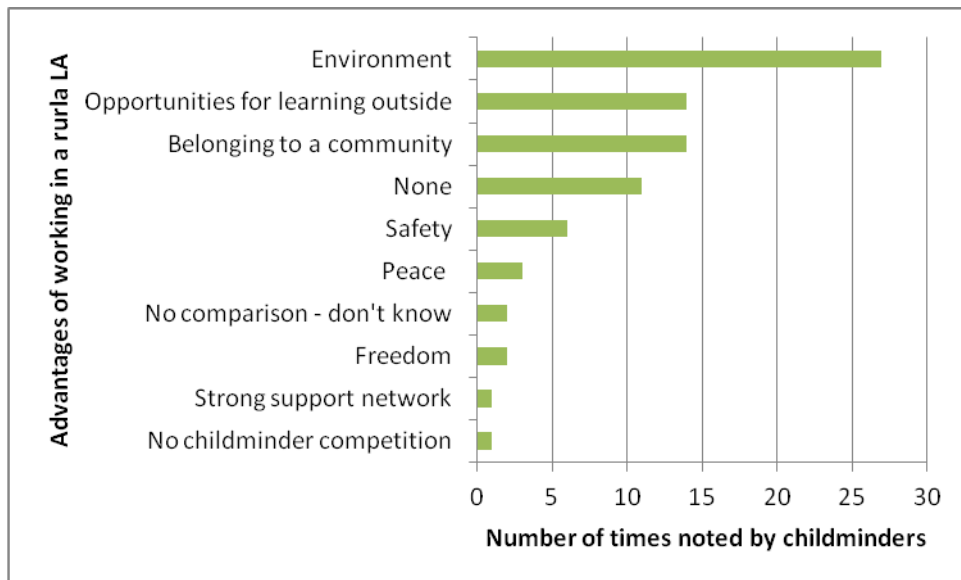
Small communities can present problems for adults, as Eleanor explained:

Because everything I do is confidential in my setting and a lot of people you see from a work point of view and you see socially and sometimes you would like to be anonymous. Sometimes you feel that you are always being watched; if you go out there are the friends of the parents of the children you've got. What I say and do, is it going to be reported back?

5.12.ii. Advantages of working within a rural LA.

The countryside in which they live and the way of life this supports was cited by the majority of the childminders; however, 14 stated either that they knew of no advantages or they were unable to make a comparison (Figure 5.12).

Figure 5.12 Advantages of working in a rural LA.



“The outdoor opportunities” which Marianne immediately suggested, were expanded upon by the majority of the respondents. The images offered appeared a reflection of the ‘rural idyll’. Josephine explained, “We have the woods nearby, the sea nearby, different environments that are normal and so therefore if you were in an urban area you would have to travel miles” but recognised, “You can easily take those for granted”. Childminders appreciated the environment, for a variety of reasons. The need for outdoor play was mentioned by Connie. “It’s absolutely gorgeous where I live out in the country. It’s ideal for kids; they are trying to get kids back out into the open as well”.

Describing the freedom, June said, “You can just walk out and go down the lane and the children are free. Children can go into fields and you don’t

have to be watching them warily all the time, there's nothing about and so they are free". Selina noted, "It is the freedom we have that supports their learning". Sonia described the learning opportunities "It's brilliant in this setting, all children are naturally inquisitive and interested in things and you can develop their language skills, their social skills, knowledge and understanding of the world, science, geography – you can do it all outside". Paige explained it thus:

We are more with nature; we can go for long walks and feel more at one with seasons and that sort of thing whereas when I was in the town, only four miles away I didn't feel that closeness. The changes in seasons didn't seem to affect me in quite the same way, they all seemed to merge into one, whereas being more rural, the changes in the farms and in the landscape and everything else around us, we feel much more connected to that and that is something I wanted to bring into my setting.

An example of using the outdoor environment was given by Bryony:

We do a lot of growing in the garden, seeds and things, we've got a lot on the go at the moment and that is one of our big things that we do and it is so lovely to grow things from seed and actually eat it. Last year our carrots were a total failure but the peas, runner beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, we had so many of them. It was lovely to see their little faces when they go and pick them. Trying to get them to eat them might be a totally different thing. I had all different coloured tomatoes last year; red ones, different shaped ones, big ones, little ones; orange ones, yellow ones, black ones – I had every colour going! A few of them ate them and said, 'Mmm, I like those'. Peas are always a success, we don't cook them we eat them raw – they taste so nice and the runner beans were absolutely fantastic last year, a very good crop.

Leanne provides experiences encountered on Forest School training:

We had this Kelly kettle, the children love it; I light it and they put sticks in and it heats up water and then they have a hot chocolate and the minute we say we are going to the forest now they always say, 'Are we having hot chocolate?' Those are their first words or 'Are you bringing the Kelly kettle?' Because they always like the fire element and then the hot chocolate to go with it so that was my major learning thing this year, the Forest school. We've had a lot of comments at the forest, 'Oh, that looks really fun!' or, 'The children are really enjoying that'.

Merryn explained, “I think nature plays a big part in children’s learning, the experiences that they can have...it’s not as manic or as hectic as an urban environment and there are more opportunities to explore the environment around them”. She thought that she had “a slower pace of life. There’s a quieter sense in this area”, a feeling shared by Tess, “It’s nice and peaceful here and seems to be slightly calmer”.

Childminders linked the sense of peace to closer awareness of the community, Jodie remarking, “It’s quite close-knit, which is an advantage”. Seeing people and developing relationships was seen as important, offering opportunities, as Sally said, “for conversation. When you are out and around, I could imagine if you are in a city you would walk past people; here people stop and talk”. Sinead saw learning in the shared opportunities:

I can take them into what I call the Free Church with a café where some of the elderly – older people in the community that we’ve got to know over the years – will come and talk to us and the children; things that people often shy away from so the children really benefit from some of the elderly gentlemen coming and talking to them and saying good morning and generally praising them for their behaviour if they are sitting eating.

These experiences reflect those of earlier research (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, p.111). The importance of ‘belonging’ was noted in Chloe’s comment:

I think it is just the sense of community and the fact that also most of the children that you are looking after are from your little village and they are growing up belonging, and even when they are with you, they are visiting the shops and areas of the village and there is a big sense of belonging, which I think maybe you don’t get to such a degree in a town.

5.13. SUPPORTING CHILDMINDERS TO ACHIEVE BETTER PRACTICE.

Childminders offered a range of strategies that they felt would facilitate the support of childminders in the development of better practice (Table 5.12). There was an opinion proffered that childminders had to be proactive in

seeking help; some childminders felt that practitioners who do not avail themselves of support do a disservice to the profession.

Table 5.12 Suggested strategies to support childminders.

Ways to support childminders	Total
Childminders proactively seeking support	11
Buddy/link childminder for at least first year	9
Regular contact with and visits from childcare worker	8
Status of childminding raised and highlighted	7
Better LA support	5
Good children's centres with advice and links to other services	5
Networks in place, especially isolated rural areas	5
More support when new	4
Regular opportunities to meet other childminders and support services	4
Requirement to attend training	4
More specific guidelines for Ofsted requirements	3
Properly trained childminders	3
Consistent and good childcare worker	2
Funding	2
Quality assurance scheme in place	2
Business skills	1
Concessions for public transport and LA facilities	1
Consistency of support in and across LAs	1
EYP/professional visit to offer objective criticism	1
Funding to support parents with childcare costs	1
Given confidence/awareness of importance of role	1
Graded training to suit childminders' developing knowledge and understanding	1
More training (prompted by recent cut-backs)	1
Online support facility	1
'Outstanding' childminders to share practice	1
Paper information – not just online	1
Portfolio included in initial training, not 'tick box' exam	1
Professional/Union voice for childminders	1
QA assessment scales backed up with support	1
Recognition of diversity of location of setting	1
Support workers knowledgeable about childminding	1
Training in the support of families	1
Training offered at times convenient to childminders	1
Training that develops knowledge and understanding of early years pedagogy, such as the OU courses.	1
Visits to other childminder settings	1

Some childminders considered that there was provision for childminders already available and it was a matter, as Cheryl commented, “On whether or not you want the help”. However, not all childminders agreed and offered a range of suggestions that might be beneficial. More opportunities for training were requested and there were specific aspects of provision some thought needed addressing.

There was an awareness of the discrepancy in the range of knowledge and understanding of practitioners; Grace felt, “In a perfect world they would all have been properly trained”. A minimum of a Level 3 qualification was suggested by Alice, with which Sadie agreed, noting, “I think they need to develop some of the childminders who don’t access any of the training [beyond] food safety, first aid and child protection”. Specifying what should be required, Felicity explained, “I think you ought to have all your basic training, but I feel that within a year you ought to have done your Level 3”. Concurring with this, Beverley thought, “Level 3s are easily obtained even by people with lower levels of education, because of the support that’s available”. To facilitate a minimum qualification, Lindsey thought there should be more accessible training “in the evenings or weekends” with Marianne emphasising, “The main thing is relevant, good quality training”.

Having progressed from basic training, there were childminders who felt that their developing knowledge and understanding is not being taken into account, with Josephine emphasising, “I think it is important that childminders’ individual educational needs are met”. Amy explained that:

Training needs to be provided at different levels – basic training for new childminders, more in-depth training for established childminders and higher level training for those who have been doing the job for years but still want to be challenged!

Chloe identified this as a different kind of training:

Less specific training but a bit more imaginative, a bit more like The Open University...where you’re made to think about things and look at examples of how other things are done. Because I don’t think a lot of

childminders would have seen or read about things, and examples of why things are done like this or how you can try that or different methods.

Maria also considered that training that supported childminders and “helped in a business way” would be useful, reflecting NCMA findings (2011, p.27).

Paige suggested:

More training on supporting families because you are not just somebody...you become very close to them and there are times...parents often look at you as the guru...and they come to you with their problems, so it's not just looking after the children. Sometimes you are supporting the whole family and you have a parent turn up on the doorstep in floods of tears because they have had an argument with their partner or something. I have a family member who has just started childminding in the last year and that is something that has taken her quite by surprise, she didn't realise that she is actually looking after the whole family rather than just the child. She has had several parents from single families having difficulties with their partners having to support them and being a shoulder to cry on first thing in the morning. So I think maybe more support for new childminders especially and maybe a bit of warning!

Samantha suggested training “for childminders to help their own children with the prospect of having other children through their house every day”. Justine thought that the likelihood of appropriate training being organised depended upon the LA and “whether they value childminders to actually push the training” reflecting findings of Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2009).

Suggestions for other LA support concerned childminding officers and networks. Remarking that some “childminders don't attend [training] and have no access to the co-ordinator” Alice feels, “The co-ordinator should probably do home visits and keep them up to scratch as well so they don't slip through the net”. Advisory personnel are inconsistent; Gloria commented, “Frequency of contact and definitely having a childcare development worker in place is really important”. Support in Leni's LA is directly related to an Ofsted judgement. “The Local Authority here will only actively look to support you if you had a ‘Satisfactory’ Ofsted grade and they figure that if you had ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ you don't need the support”.

Linking with other professionals through network meetings and informal contact was considered vital. Selina emphatically stated, “Childminders need a network that enables them to support each other backed by professionals who can offer that support and guidance”. Hannah explained, “I think encouraging childminders in general to get together a bit more often and not work in isolation is very beneficial”. She also saw a need for LA officers to take on an active role in providing critical feedback, as did Justine who noted that working alone you have nothing to compare your practice to. Noting there is only “Ofsted to tell you that you are doing a good job” Jodie added, “It’s hard because you do feel that you are quite alone in what you do and it is gauging [a standard]”. Sonia said she would like “opportunities to go in and spend time in other people’s settings” but recognised the difficulties, especially living some distance away from other childminders. However, too close a contact can be perceived as threatening, as Esther explained:

It shouldn’t be a competition, it should be that actually we are all trying to be as good as each other and if something works then we should share it, we should provide it for children. We shouldn’t keep it to ourselves and just provide it for our own childminded children we should actually spread the word and make children’s lives better and experiences better.

Negative experiences of children’s centres led Eleanor to comment that she felt LA support through open access could help childminders. “We did go through a stage that if we had too many children they didn’t particularly like us going”. Maddy had a similar experience saying, “That’s what we lack as childminders - places to go. We get very bad press if we hit the libraries or the toddler groups in any big form because they think we are taking over”. Tess had encountered a different attitude noting that until recently, “The children’s centres have been a big support, particularly where we go”.

Support from LAs to work through a quality assurance scheme was considered to be helpful, offering a framework; Jenna thought, “There should be more encouragement to work through those”. Harriett suggested a “pack to work from for the paperwork side of things” and Tanya thought, “We could develop our practice better if we actually knew what they [Ofsted] were

looking for.” Annette explained there is no specific guidance, particularly for new practitioners; in preschool new practitioners are shown:

How they do their observations, how they put their planning in place so you would fall into a routine of how they do things and make improvements as you go. But when you set up as a childminder like me you have no experience of doing it before.

Elissa agreed new childminders need more support and several interviewees described the ‘Buddy schemes’ in which they had supported new childminders, June explaining:

They could ring me up in the evening. A lot of things you wouldn’t bother the Support Officer with, because she might not be able to help anyway; asking another childminder who was in the same position what should she do about this or that, it was often a personal thing, like how to approach a parent about something. A lot of people did say it was helpful.

Joyce felt it worked because new practitioners received an empathetic response from ‘buddies’ who have an understanding of “what they are going through at the beginning because they are working and doing exactly the same thing. I know a lot of the childminders I have worked with have been appreciative of having someone else to ask questions”. Mentoring worked as a two way reciprocal arrangement as Sonia explained:

They could come to your setting or you could go to theirs; I actually quite liked that – you were made to feel wanted and useful and valued. It was a valuable service. It keeps you on your toes because if a new childminder asks you a question you have to stop and think about it so it makes you analyse what you do and why you’re doing it.

Seven respondents thought raising the profile of childminders is important; Mary suggesting a “more positive portrayal of them in the media and from other professionals” with an acknowledgement that in the childminding role, “You are doing the same job as what a nursery and a preschool would do”, as Pamela said. Jamie agreed but was not sure how. Jemima thinks:

If there were almost like a trade union for childminders...I am sure the NCMA would say they are that...but I feel they need their own lobbying force that will make people understand that the role that the

childminder does is exactly the same as the role that an EYFS teacher has within the school. It's about somebody lobbying so that there's an understanding that they're doing a professional job.

The close relationships between practitioner and families discussed earlier in this chapter does make the childminder more aware of individual circumstances, Sinead commenting:

It's really hard because childcare costs...we need to go up but it's very hard to put your costs up when parents aren't earning enough money to pay their childcare costs. So if the government put some more money towards childcare, to parents paying for their childcare costs, that would be very helpful, but I don't think that will happen.

There was a suggestion from Jodie that, "Some sort of facility, whether it be online, to support and give ideas specifically about early years education and development" would be a way in which there could be support offered to childminders irrespective of where they lived.

Polly felt 'outstanding' childminders was a valuable resource, being ignored:

I thought that part of me, having achieved that, was to help mentor other people and to take part in things like I am doing with you now; to help the whole industry of childminding if you like, to help to encourage other people to come in but to signpost people as well.

Ofsted (2008) states that an 'outstanding' judgement demonstrates practice that is, "Exemplary – so good that it is worth disseminating beyond the setting" (p.28), confirming LAs are not using the expertise of successful childminders to support and further develop other practitioners.

5.14. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.

The interviews took place during a period of economic recession and severe government cut-backs impacting upon LA budgets. Suggesting a separation of the care and education elements in childminding and removing

childminders from Ofsted’s remit, the Chief Inspector stated, “We need to think about how we network childminding institutions with high-performing children’s centres and Sure Start centres and nurseries” (House of Commons, 2012, Q83). Demonstrating a lack of knowledge and understanding of the holistic nature of early education and an ignorance of the topographical challenges this suggestion would present, this proposal has the potential to reverse the progress made by childminders. Joyce, a childminder for 25 years said, “It would undo all the hard work that over the years has taken place to raise the profile of childminders so that they and others feel that they are doing a proper professional job”.

5.14.i. The de-registering of childminders.

Table 5.13 Perception of the consequences of childminder de-regulation.

Opinion	Number of childminders sharing view.
Implies childminders are of less value than other early years practitioners	9
A regressive step	7
Safeguarding children will be at risk	4
Devalues work	4
Standards could drop	2
Professional childminders would leave	2
Isolation of childminders makes regulation more important	1
Changing inspection process is demoralising	1
Would push childminders ‘underground’	1
Parents would have no means of knowing where they could access good practice	1
Parental options decreased	1
Shows contempt for early years pedagogy/guidance	1
Childminders no longer able to provide EY accredited education	1
Restricts parents option to claim tax credits	1
Part of Ofsted cost cutting strategy	1
Makes children, childminders and their parents/carers very vulnerable	1

Childminders with whom this was discussed rejected this proposal. The governments' proposed reform is not based on true facts. Truss (2012b) asserted that all childminders belong to a network. This claim was used to underpin her argument for change, yet findings demonstrate this cannot be the case. Wilshaw, Ofsted Chief Inspector, stated, "Every time a youngster goes into a childminding setting, we have to inspect" (House of Commons, 2012, Q.83). This is also untrue and emphatically rejected by Carley who stated, "Ofsted are on a cost cutting mission, and seem to be under the impression that we have to be inspected every time a new child starts with us...not true". Set out in tabular form, the presentation hides the childminders' despair, frustration, sadness and anger that these proposals have generated, which I share.

5.14.ii. Changes to the registration and inspection system.

The majority of the childminders thought the present system of registration and inspection should continue. There were two who thought it should be changed, and suggested LAs become responsible for registration. Sonia proposed that prospective childminders should "complete the registration course before they become registered" and so deter "any potential time/money wasters which would, therefore, help reduce current registration costs".

Discussing inspections, two childminders thought the LA should take on this role, envisaging a system of regular quality checks that fed into supported improvement. The remainder thought Ofsted inspections should continue in the present form, but with the proviso of consistency.

5.14.iii. Childminder qualifications.

Findings have shown that this group of childminders have been proactive in developing their own knowledge and understanding of early years development and education. The requirement to hold a qualification would,

as Leni suggested, “Sort out the sheep from the goats!” The commitment to the job was seen as important. Childminders are protective of their hard-earned success and so want to safeguard the progress that has been made. Fourteen childminders thought a Level 3 qualification should be the minimum requirement and another two thought this should be obligatory within a year of registering. There were three childminders who thought Level 4/5 or a degree should be mandatory; as Maria explained, “It is the minimum for school age children so why should early years be treated to less?”

Challenges to the present status quo have resulted in childminders reflecting on their position and realising just how far they have travelled. Andrea, who has achieved a degree explained:

A few years ago I would have said it would be unfair to make practitioners do qualifications if they did not want to, (so long as they were good when working with the children), but since I have started my own further studies I have changed my mind, so now I feel all early years practitioners should be qualified.

5.15. SUMMARY.

This chapter has documented the interviews conducted with childminders. The conversations offered insights into practice and provision and provided opportunities to probe in greater depth aspects childminders felt pertinent to the development of quality. Childminders’ reaction to evolving political developments was also reported. The interviews produced both quantitative and qualitative data; the findings are presented together so that the voices of the childminders could bring the statistics to life. The main findings emerging from the childminder interviews were:

- Greatest support has been gained from other practitioners;
- Practitioners had undertaken new or further specific childcare qualifications since becoming childminders;

- Childminders aspire to further develop their academic learning;
- Childminders felt organised paperwork influenced the inspection outcome;
- Securing children's happiness and providing for individual needs are regarded by childminders as an important aspect of a quality setting;
- Not all aspects of the childminding role are recognised in an Ofsted inspection;
- A 'Buddy system' for new childminders is invaluable for mentor and mentee;
- Regular, better LA support is needed, from well qualified officers;
- LA networks need to be established and maintained;
- Training offered needs to take account of the developing knowledge and understanding of practitioners gained through academic study;
- The timing of training and distances to venues are a frustration;
- The low status of childminding needs to be addressed;
- Childminders oppose the idea of de-registering;
- The current system of Ofsted inspection should be retained;
- Childminders should be required to have or to achieve a Level 3 qualification within one year of registering.

The following chapter will bring together the findings documented in this and the previous chapter, relating them to the research questions.

Chapter Six: Discussion.

6.1. INTRODUCTION.

This chapter brings together findings from the LA questionnaires, Ofsted reports analysis, presented in Chapter Four, and childminder interviews, presented in Chapter Five. I will first relate the research findings to each of the sub-questions, and then draw the evidence together to answer the research questions.

6.2. ANSWERING THE RESEARCH SUB-QUESTIONS.

6.2.i. Does the support for childminders differ between LAs and if so, how?

At the beginning of the study reported in this thesis I held the view that a large rural LA would be less successful at supporting childminders than a more compact urban LA, the main reason being accessibility. This thesis demonstrates that this is not the case; there are major differences between LA support irrespective of the DEFRA category.

A large number of LAs had no available records of registered childminders' qualifications (Appendix 4.2); 31% returned incomplete records. The lack of knowledge of childminders' qualification levels could account for the frustration childminders reported when attending training that did not meet their needs.

The personnel structure within LAs varies across DEFRA categories. Nine of the ten LAs with the highest number of outstanding childminders have a

person with sole responsibility for childminders. The number of staff supporting childminders varies amongst all LAs resulting in the ratio of support ranging from 1:17.5 to 1:298, the mean being 1:187 (Appendix 4.4).

Eight of the ten LAs with the highest number of outstanding childminders have organised childminder networks, seven respondents made mention of the training offered through this arrangement (Appendix 4.5). Membership criteria vary as does the function of the groups; the majority based on qualification level or quality assurance (QA) compliance. Whilst not specifying what the terminology means, six mention 'peer support' or 'peer mentoring' in their responses. Findings show that one LA has a clearly structured framework of support and childminders are encouraged to work through the three levels; others have nothing in place to provide a means of developing the expertise of this group of practitioners and there is a range of schemes in place along the continuum of support. Availability of information for childminders is diverse, ranging from a structured website resource to the onus placed on childminders to attend information sessions to receive updates.

This thesis has found that records held by LAs vary and the support offered differs enormously between LAs resulting in inequity for childminders:

- LAs without networks meant childminders were unable to draw down the Early Years Entitlement Funding; to receive this, parents therefore had to withdraw their child and enrol them in a setting permitted to run the scheme, a preschool, nursery or school, none of which may be offering childcare of an equal quality. Grace noted:

Fortunately, the children I've got, the parents are in a financial situation to keep them with me 'til four, but if they haven't then they have to leave me at three to go to a nursery to get their free places.

- The inconsistency between network membership criteria meant childminders in some LAs were able to access services denied to

childminders in LAs with more stringent standards. Childminders commented on the additional opportunities available once they were allowed to join a network.

- LAs with a high number of childminders to support worker inevitably meant infrequent contact and individual support. This appeared to be evident amongst the interviewees, some of whom reported never having had a visit from an officer of the LA. Kirsten noted the implications of this situation:

I think that [Ofsted] should do a touch base visit every year with a paperwork investigation every three years. Just a 20 minutes' walk through the door, check that the childminder's sane, leave...The idea of people working completely unconnected to anybody for three years scares me.

- The lack of a specialist childminding officer suggests some practitioners working in such LAs are likely to have as much, if not more knowledge and understanding of the childminder role. This echoed information gathered through email communication with LA officers and confirmed my own working experience; there are supporting officers with lower qualification levels and less knowledge and understanding than the practitioners they are advising. Carley explained:

Sometimes they ask me for advice, because the staff involved are just generic, they're not specifically childminders and they've often got no early years experience themselves – they are like office staff...You can sit and read the manual but it's not the same as doing the job.

This element of the research findings suggests that the “uneven playing field” Leah describes as impacting upon early years practitioners working in different types of settings within one LA, also affects childminders working in different LAs across the country.

6.2.ii. Is there a link between the support offered by LAs and the number of childminders achieving ‘outstanding’ practice?

The LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders responded to the questionnaire and so this research question can be answered. The findings reported in Chapter Four identified that the rural LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders:

- Holds full records of childminders’ qualifications;
- Shares support with a Service Provider;
- Operates a ratio of one support worker to 74 childminders (LA mean 1:187);
- Employs an officer with sole responsibility for supporting childminders;
- Has an established childminder network;
- Has a structured network system through which childminders are supported to progress;
- Has a network with no initial criteria to meet but evidence of practice and training is required to access higher levels;
- Has a quality assurance scheme incorporated into their network structure;
- Has internet information that is continually updated; hard copies of information are also sent to childminders.

The range of support offered to childminders by LAs differed enormously. There is no evidence to explain why this is the case, however, Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2009), examining links between funding, early years provision and ‘value added’, suggested it was the “level of the local authority’s commitment to early years education” (p.24) that determined the approach taken. I would propose there are two other facets influencing support. The

level of knowledge, understanding and relevant qualifications of LA personnel and the attitude adopted towards the childminder workforce. Childminder interviews, LA responses to questionnaires and my personal professional experiences all provide evidence of instances where LA officers with lower qualifications than practitioners are employed to provide advice to those working in the early years.

I had anticipated that compact urban LAs would have a higher percentage of 'outstanding' practitioners as logistically, supporting a relatively easily accessible workforce appeared to be less problematic than working with a dispersed group of childminders. I assumed that LAs in which there are universities with renowned early years academics, officers would have been drawing upon opportunities emanating from such expertise. Additionally, where a well-known quality assurance Kite Mark scheme has been developed, referred to by a number of "key informants" representing early years at government, LA and charity representative level (Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson, 2009), I had assumed a positive impact upon Ofsted judgements. In the urban LA that had devised this Kite Mark scheme, eight childminders, 4% of those inspected, received an 'outstanding' judgement. This compared to the rural LA mean figure of 11%. In 15 of the 19 rural LAs, eight or more childminders were awarded 'outstanding' judgements (Table 4.1).

6.2.iii. What are the common elements of effective childminder practice identified in Ofsted reports of childminders working in rural LAs?

I devised an analytical framework to interrogate the Ofsted reports of the childminders receiving an 'outstanding' judgement. This was completed in two parts – those of childminders in the LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' judgements awarded and those of the interviewed childminders. Comparisons were made and findings reported in Chapter Four.

Elements of quality that were recorded in every report were:

- Knowledge and understanding of how children learn;
- Knowledge and understanding of health and safety;
- Trusting, effective relationships with families and carers;
- A reflective practitioner with a commitment to improve.

There was clear evidence of other aspects of quality identified in Ofsted reports (Figures 4.8 – 4.12). Seven additional elements of quality were evidenced in 90% of the reports from both groups:

- Knowledge and understanding of statutory requirements;
- Routines meet individual needs and routines;
- Observation and planning for next steps;
- Child-led indoor and outdoor activity;
- Trusting sensitive relationships with children;
- Opportunities to share information;
- Attendance at training.

6.2.iv. How do childminders in rural LAs characterise quality provision?

Kirsten suggested that her perception of quality would be “different to that of Ofsted”; nonetheless, 6.2.iii demonstrates that the quality being looked for by Ofsted inspectors was clearly evident in childminders’ provision. Additionally, correlating childminders’ responses (Table 5.6, p.118) against the findings from the studies of Mathers et al. (2012), Fauth et al. (2011) and Sylva et al. (2004), Ofsted inspection criteria (DCSF, 2008, pp.13-14) and elements reported in childminders’ inspection reports revealed that this group

of childminders viewed quality more broadly (Appendix 6.1). This reflects Mathers et al.'s (2012) assertion that an Ofsted inspection report was one piece of the quality "jigsaw" (p.44). Overall, there were only three elements that were not evidenced in childminders' practice. These were two EPPE elements (Sylva et al., 2004) – a balance between child and adult initiated activity, and a high level of parental engagement in their children's learning – and the use of community resources, identified by Fauth et al. (2011). Childminder interviews evidenced that childminders valued and made good use of the community, although practitioners did not articulate this as an element of quality practice.

Findings show therefore that childminders' perception of quality is broader than the Ofsted criteria underpinning an 'outstanding' judgement. The fundamental characteristics of quality provision for childminders is a secure, safe environment in which happy and loving relationships are nurtured and developmentally appropriate experiences shared, enabling all children to reach their full potential.

6.2.v. What sources of support do rural childminders feel have impacted upon their practice leading to an 'outstanding' Ofsted judgement?

Childminders in this study identified that other practitioners' support has had the greatest impact, reflecting the findings of Fauth et al. (2011) and Mooney et al. (2001) however, Mooney et al. (2001) reported around two-thirds of respondents did not meet regularly with other childminders. The childminders in this study reported that both formal and informal childminder networks were crucial to their success, with practitioners travelling over ten miles to access groups regularly. These meetings provided training opportunities; information and resource sharing; and offering and receiving general advice. Some childminders work with other practitioners in their

home and believe this has enabled them to develop quality practice. Others have a working relationship with another childminder, the planning discussions and professional link provides a source of personal development. Contact with other practitioners and settings are valued for professional development; including childminders in training with other early years practitioners has increased opportunities for learning and recognised and valued childminders as equals.

The training undertaken since becoming childminders had impacted upon practice and attitude towards the role. Increased knowledge and understanding had enabled practitioners to develop confidence in their work with children and families, in supporting less experienced childminders through mentoring and also in establishing local training groups. Funding provided by LAs has made it possible for childminders to access qualifications and this was further supported for some by the encouragement of LA officers who gave practitioners belief in their own ability. For some childminders, childcare qualifications allowed them to join networks, which in turn enabled them to access further training, embark upon QA schemes and further develop the reflective practice that all childminders identified as crucial. It is significant that the LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' childminders operates an open network structure that includes a QA scheme.

The impact networks could make on quality improvement has been promoted by the NCMA, and this model of development was acknowledged in 2001 when LAs were required – through the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships created after 1997 and allocated funding – to establish at least three childminding networks, each with a minimum of 20 practitioners (Owen, 2007, p.53). Findings confirmed that network structures are important for supporting childminders, contributing to quality provision, and raising childminder status amongst childminders and parents (Dawson, 2003, pp.3-4). Reviewing the situation, Owen (2007, p.57) feared for the continued retention of networks without ring-fenced government funding;

findings from the LA questionnaire and childminder interviews demonstrate these fears were warranted.

50% of the childminders living in the LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' judgements rated aspects of support provided by the LA – for gaining qualifications, for non-qualification training and for advice – as 'very good'. This compared to 32% of all rural childminders and 34% of childminders across England (NCMA, 2011). The rating was reversed for support from other practitioners, 16% of childminders in the LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' childminders, rating other practitioners support as 'very good', compared to 53% of the remaining respondents. There could be a variety of reasons for these statistics and the low numbers on which comparisons are being made has to be treated with caution, however, responses suggest the structured, inclusive network is valued by childminders. Barker (2012), an Early Years Consultant conducting research within the LA in which she worked, reported childminders identified the LA as offering the most support. This reflects findings in the rural LA with the highest number of 'outstanding' childminders; however, replying to an officer from the LA could have influenced responses.

Childminders felt the support from their own families was an important factor contributing to their achievement. Some childminders include their partners in their practice; others have been supported through business skills offered. Childminders identified the need for proficiency in order to manage the administrative aspects of practice, highlighted by the emphasis placed on paperwork in an inspection. There were childminders who had been able to draw on previous training and work experience and felt having these transferable skills had been important.

Several childminders thought that their personal characteristics and dispositions had been fundamental to their achievement – whatever challenge they undertake, they want to succeed at the highest standard.

6.2.vi. Do ‘outstanding’ childminders use their knowledge, understanding and expertise to support and influence other childminders, and in what ways?

Findings showed that there are some LAs in which respondents proactively support other childminders through informal networks that are used to deliver self-organised training. This reflects both childminders’ self-motivation, identified as a personal trait in this study, and an understanding of the importance of peer development (Dawson, 2003). Childminders in one LA actively seek out new practitioners, sending a newsletter and invitation to join the group, all of which is self-funded. In another LA, childminders in a network designed, paid for and distributed leaflets advertising they were able to draw down Early Years Entitlement Funding thus providing an option for parents to consider when choosing childcare (Mooney and Munton, 1998, p.103), action reflecting Greener’s (2009) “institution-building or entrepreneurial behaviour” (p.187).

Some LAs have, in the past, paid ‘outstanding’ childminders to mentor new childminders through peer-support schemes. Childminders were able to use their own knowledge and expertise to help others and to develop their own skills of reflection, self-evaluation and communication. There is evidence of at least one LA recognising the expertise gained through previous employment offering further training to a childminder who in turn led training sessions with childminder cluster groups. This is not widespread and childminders reported having had no contact from LA officers on receiving an ‘outstanding’ judgement.

Understandably, childminders expressed disappointment that their expertise was unacknowledged, an attitude I believe that not only perpetuates a lack of appreciation of childminders but also demonstrates ‘bad housekeeping’. Having invested government funding into workforce training, LAs are

overlooking the rich combination of knowledge and understanding developed through study with the depth of expertise gained in practice.

6.3. ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS.

6.3.i. What factors enable childminders working in rural English LAs to achieve 'outstanding' practice?

This study has identified that childminders ascribe their 'outstanding' practice to the following factors:

- Supportive childminding colleagues;
- Formal and informal childminding networks;
- Qualification training;
- Knowledgeable LA support and development officers;
- Quality assurance schemes;
- Supportive families;
- Organizational and clerical skills;
- Previous experiences and transferable skills;
- Personal characteristics.

Not all childminders feel supported by their LA. Findings from the LA questionnaire responses show a disparity between LA support and confirms this view to be justified, therefore home-based practitioners have relied upon other childminders to provide advice and help.

Findings show that where the LA has a structured network which incorporates supported quality assurance, childminders value the provision of the LA more highly than that of colleagues. The LA with the highest

number of 'outstanding' childminders is organised in this way, and so the factors that facilitate quality provision are:

- A structured network system through which all childminders are supported to progress;
- A quality assurance scheme incorporated into the network structure;
- A low number of childminders to support worker;
- A full record of childminders' qualifications;
- Officer/s with sole responsibility for supporting childminders;
- Effective systems of communication with childminders, providing both internet and where needed, hard copies of information.

6.3.ii. How can 'outstanding' childminders contribute to the development of childminding practice and provision?

Several childminders report that funding cut-backs have curtailed some of their work more recently, however, many of those interviewed gave examples of contributions to the development of childminding practice and provision:

- Mentoring and peer to peer support;
- Creating and sustaining informal networks;
- Creating and sustaining opportunities for childminder training;
- Working with colleagues to extend parents' knowledge of services offered;
- Using internet forums as a focal point for advice and support.

6.4. SUMMARY.

I have reviewed the findings and explained how they have answered my research questions. I presented evidence demonstrating that the sample of childminders in this study understand, articulate and provide a breadth of quality home-based childcare, despite many difficulties. At the beginning of my work, I thought the barriers rural childminders had to overcome were geographical. The thesis demonstrates that additionally, inconsistent LA support; insufficient qualified and knowledgeable LA officers; the lack of networks; training that does not meet childminders' growing expertise; inappropriate timing of training; financial concerns; and lack of acknowledgement of the childminder role all present problems to overcome. The recent economic recession and subsequent funding cuts have all increased the difficulties they are facing and, it might be assumed that this is the case for many other childminders, so the recommendations I will propose in my final chapter may be relevant beyond rural LA boundaries.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Recommendations.

“If people knew what is at stake in the first few years of life, small children would be considered society’s treasures”.

Rosa Maria Torres, (2008).

7.1. INTRODUCTION.

This chapter will relate conclusions drawn from the research to the literature and consider the relevance of findings in the current political and economic context. It also discusses the ways in which the study has met my aims, contributed to knowledge and makes recommendations for practice and policy and suggests areas for research. I conclude the chapter reflecting on how political and economic changes that have occurred during the writing of this thesis are threatening the recognition gained by childminders in recent years.

7.2. REFLECTING ON THE AIMS OF THE RESEARCH.

This thesis set out to analyse the relationship between the support offered by LAs to childminders and the achievement of quality home-based provision. I aimed to collect and document information that would identify LA support available to rural childminders and establish the relationship between LA provision and ‘outstanding’ childminder judgements. I aimed to examine perceptions of ‘quality’ in order to discover if there is a common aspiration held by Ofsted inspectors and those inspected to see if the same goals are being pursued. I set out to ascertain sources that successful childminders have drawn upon to develop their ‘outstanding’ practice, anticipating the information will be useful to LAs planning support. The study produced

important findings that I believe can be used for this purpose; Section 7.5 reports my recommendations. All of my research aims have been achieved.

7.3. RELATING THE FINDINGS TO THE LITERATURE.

When starting my empirical study in 2008, the political and educational landscape was very different to the scene at its conclusion in January 2013. The Early Years Foundation Stage was introduced in September 2008 and simultaneously, registered childminders were incorporated into the early years workforce and required to deliver the EYFS. I had worked with and taught childminders and was concerned that there appeared to be disparity of support for home-based practitioners, both within the early years workforce and between LAs, despite working within the same framework.

Childminding is an under researched sector of early years provision (Barker, 2012; Fauth et al., 2011; Owen, 2007; Mooney, Knight, Moss and Owen, 2001). Much of the research literature portrays childminders in a poor light (Jones and Osgood, 2007), suggesting practitioners are poorly educated women who have received little training nor are seeking any (JRF, 2001). I therefore chose to examine the history behind childminding that had brought about this perception of home-based care and found that it has been a long neglected area of early years provision, with successive governments failing to recognise and address the difficulties working parents encounter (Lewis, 2012; Bond and Kersey, 2002; Bussemaker, 1997; Randall, 1995). Research undertaken from the 1960s to the end of the century drew attention to the plight of children as well as the problems faced by parents to find care for their children (Bruner, 1980; Jackson and Jackson, 1979; Mayall and Petrie, 1977; Jackson, 1974; National Elfreda Rathbone Society, 1974).

This thesis shows that childminders feel the perception of home-based practitioners has remained low and their professionalism is not widely recognised, reflecting studies carried out over ten years ago. Childminders in the sample expressed concern that proposals to change the registration and inspection procedures (House of Commons, 2012; Truss, 2012b) will perpetuate this view.

Recent research has focused on childminder networks, particularly in quality development (Owen and Fauth, 2010; Owen, 2007; Owen, 2005), however, as this thesis has shown, networks are not available to all childminders. The longitudinal EPPE research (Sylva et al., 2004) included a small group of childminders in the project, however, no quality indicators were included in the findings (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Childminders were included in research that was conducted in the UK and North America (Leach, 2009), which investigated a range of childcare provision, concluding care, both of high and low quality, was found. Research by Fauth et al. (2011) sought to examine childminders' views on key elements of their practice, to establish childminders' understanding of how children learn and develop, and ascertain opinions of the EYFS.

My findings concur those of Owen (2007; 2005) highlighting the importance of networks both for training and other forms of childminder support. Key elements of practice identified by Fauth et al. (2011) were evident in my own findings; I have drawn upon this research, as well as that of Mathers et al. (2012) and Sylva et al. (2004) in my discussion of quality.

7.4. MY CONTRIBUTION TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE.

I believe this empirical research study makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge on childminder practice and provision for the following reasons:

- Childminding is an under-researched area of early years education; this thesis adds to the literature;
- This study has provided a different perspective of childminders which has been lacking; that of articulate, educated, reflective, committed professionals;
- Findings have established the sources of support that childminders' link to quality practice, hitherto unidentified, providing a foundation on which policy and provision can be developed;
- Aspects of LA support that have contributed to quality practice have been identified.

7.5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE.

Findings from this empirical study provided answers to my research questions:

What factors enable childminders working in rural LAs to achieve 'outstanding' practice?

How can 'outstanding' childminders contribute to the development of childminding practice and provision?

I therefore propose the following recommendations for consideration.

1. LA officers with responsibility for supporting childminders should hold a relevant Early Years Degree.

Childminders reported a lack of appropriate guidance from LA officers who hold little expertise in, or experience of, childminding. The vision of a highly qualified workforce held by the previous government and

reiterated by the present (DfE, 2012b), can only be accomplished by LAs sharing the same aspirations, and having appropriate knowledge and understanding. The DfE website states, “We want a system that is led by the professionals who understand how best to deliver these services” (DfE, 2012c). Whilst this refers to practitioners, I believe a relevant degree should be a minimum qualification for those responsible for advising childminders.

2. LAs establish a structured network system, incorporating a quality assurance scheme through which all childminders are supported to progress.

This recommendation reflects the organisation of the rural LA with the highest number of ‘outstanding’ childminders. The benefits of a structured approach led by appropriately qualified co-ordinators are:

- LAs are able to monitor all childminders and provide the appropriate support;
- Childminders are engaged in Continuous Professional Development, at a level that acknowledges the developing knowledge, understanding and expertise of practitioners;
- Childminders have access to peer support, a factor rated as a key element in the development of quality practice;
- Networks and the promotion of quality assurance and training can be used to raise the status of childminders within the LA (Owen, 2005) and increase parents’ awareness of childcare options;
- Networks can be responsive to the local logistical difficulties for childminders of training location and timing.

3. A national childminder website is created that is managed by qualified personnel who are able to offer advice, support, administrative proforma and training modules created specifically for home-based practitioners.

Nutbrown (2012a, pp.52-53) has identified the potential of on-line resources for the early years sector. The development of childminding provision has been fragmented. The creation of a national website will help to create a cohesive sector as well as provide resources for Ofsted inspectors to gain greater knowledge and understanding of the practitioners they are inspecting. Managed by suitably qualified and experienced personnel, the site has the capability of being responsive to the needs of childminders.

4. LAs establish and support a peer mentoring system for childminders.

Childminders have identified the value of mentoring. New childminders should have the support of an experienced and qualified childminder for at least the first year of practice. Mentoring is recommended for all newly qualified practitioners starting in their first employment (Nutbrown, 2012a). I believe it to be essential for childminders, and crucial for those who do not possess relevant early years' qualifications or experience. Mentoring has the potential of benefitting the mentor, enabling them to develop confidence in their ability to articulate the rationale behind their practice.

5. The current system of universal inspection is maintained.

Childminder respondents overwhelmingly thought that the current system should remain, with the proviso that there is a move towards consistency on the part of Ofsted.

The findings from the LA questionnaire and interviews have demonstrated the diversity that results from fragmented interpretation of requirements. Devolving inspection to a range of inspection suppliers is likely to create more incoherence, not only between childminders working in different LAs but between early years providers in the same LA. This will not only make childcare choices problematic for parents and carers but is likely to create a two-tier system of provision, further lowering the status of childminders.

6. The current system of registration and regulation is maintained.

Childminders who have worked under changing organisational structures are alarmed at the prospect of de-regulation currently under consideration by the government. There is concern that a lower opinion of childminders will be created as well as great anxiety for the safety of children. Childminders understand there are expectations that there will be a lowering of charges as a result of de-regulation. This study has highlighted the already insubstantial income childminders receive and payment issues, an ongoing problem (Fauth et al., 2011; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Mooney and Munton, 1998); even lower childminding rates will exacerbate this situation.

7. The current system of statutory support by LAs is maintained.

On the basis of this research it is very clear that the LA support for childminders is crucial to maintaining high standards and that there are specific elements that make the support successful, therefore a statutory duty to provide support should be maintained.

7.6. DISSEMINATION AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.

Initial interest in this research project was shown by several people during the data collection stage; I have been asked to send my findings to LA respondents, childminders, and was contacted by the NCMA Research Officer following enquiries for information.

I therefore feel the findings will be significant to a range of groups:

- LA officers with responsibility for childminders;
- LA officers responsible for early years training;
- The NCMA;
- Childminding service providers;
- Early years academics.

Initially I plan to develop a briefing paper for those who have requested information. I shall submit articles to practitioners' professional publications and to peer-reviewed journals for wider dissemination. I shall also send a briefing paper to the office of Elizabeth Truss, the minister who is driving the move to deregulate childminders.

The lack of literature has been noted, indicating childminding is an area of early years education that needs to be examined in more detail. To increase the body of knowledge, future research might:

- Include the views of children and parents to provide a wider perspective;
- Examine the views of practitioners achieving a range of inspection outcomes, providing an opportunity to study how the various needs of childminders are being met;

- Examine how working in partnership with another childminder impacts upon practice;
- Conduct individual in-depth childminder case studies;
- Conduct case studies of successful, self-help networks;
- Examine childminder support from the perspective of a planning officer, in rural LAs;
- Examine the roles of LA childminder support officers.

7.7. REFLECTIONS.

7.7.i. Early years care and education: to create a better future for vulnerable children.

The New Labour government was committed to eradicating child poverty. A target was set in 1998 of achieving the aim by 2020, subsequently the financial investment into the early years during the three terms of that government was the highest ever made (OECD, 2000). Notwithstanding a change of government, in 2010 the Child Poverty Act was “voted through by all political parties” (Field, 2010, p.13) and the momentum appeared to be sustained. Field (2010) has proposed that “Foundation Years” should be adopted as the terminology identifying the early years of a child’s life, from birth to five, not only to raise awareness of the importance of this period of life, but, “To establish the Foundation Years as of equal status and importance in the public mind to primary and secondary school years” (p.6). Research has highlighted the importance of the early years in a child’s life and has identified that good quality childcare provision enhances the lifelong chances of children (Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, and Nores, 2005; Sylva et al., 2004). The belief that reducing educational inequality would support later life chances (OECD, 2012b; Feinstein, 2003)

was a contributory factor in the development of early years provision. Longitudinal research results demonstrate that low social class and poor family financial circumstances create barriers which will mean “children do not, on average, overcome the hurdle of lower initial attainment combined with continued low input” (Feinstein, 2000, p.87). Investment in quality childcare provision therefore was a strategy used to address the disadvantaged situation into which some children were born.

Research suggests that the investment in human capital during the early years “generates a higher rate of return on public intervention than later stages of education, even more so for disadvantaged children” (OECD, 2012b, p.14). Sweinhart and Heckman (2010) report research has shown that for every dollar invested in the High/Scope programme, there is a societal return of over 16 dollars (p.12).

7.7.ii. Early years care and education: to create a better future for whom?

Fundamental to the vision of raising children out of poverty was the assumption it would be achieved through parental employment (Ben-Galim, 2011). In Chapter One I discussed the notion that mothers returning to work has been vital for the economic growth of this country (TSO 2009); the expansion of childcare is a necessity, providing a facility for workers’ children and extending the workforce that in turn contributes to the economy (OECD, 2012b; Leach, 2009; Penn, 2007; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; Morgan, 1996). Bunkett (DfEE 1998b) stated in the Foreword of the Green Paper ‘The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain’ that future global economy depended upon investment in human capital. Feinstein (2003) explained how the development of “human capital is an essential aspect of many current issues in economics” (p.74). The influencing factor of ECEC development is set out in an OECD (2006) document:

Although investments in ECEC services have been influenced by the importance of child development and by seeing young children as citizens with their own rights and needs, broader social and economic factors have generally directed government attention to ECEC issues. (p.19)

Reiterating the importance of women in the workforce, data is included in the discussion, showing “that women’s work now accounts for 30% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the United Kingdom” (OECD, 2006, p.20).

The financial sector has been responsible for creating an international crisis that has resulted, nationally, in a cut in personal incomes, full-time employment and public services, described as a “Perfect Storm” (Oxfam, 2012, p.3). Prior to this, the approach of encouraging people to take out loans has resulted in huge personal debt, exacerbated now by borrowing to pay household bills (Oxfam, 2012, p.30; Save the Children, 2012, p.4). A money charity reported that, “Outstanding unsecured (consumer credit) lending stood at £158b. at the end of September 2012”; additionally, personal debtors “owed nearly as much as the entire country produced during the whole of 2011”, (Credit Action, 2012).

The impact upon childhood poverty is profound (Oxfam, 2012, Save the Children, 2012). The present government’s portrayal of poverty is that it is self-inflicted, articulated by Iain Duncan Smith (Secretary of State for Work and Pensions 2012) who stated that merely raising a family above the poverty line is insufficient, “There must be some kind of change in their life or they will risk slipping back”...to the drug addiction or worklessness and welfare dependency he goes on to discuss (Department for Work and Pensions [DWP], 2012). His words reflect the attitude of administrators of the Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834:

The new Act was pioneering in introducing a role for central government in the care of the poor, and remained in force throughout the Victorian age. But, as social commentators remarked, the treatment of genuine hardship caused by economic circumstances

beyond the control of the individual had been ignored (Parliament, UK, 2012).

Perpetuating the argument that economic prosperity will be achieved by getting more women into the workforce fails to recognise that it is inequality that raises barriers to economic growth (Oxfam, 2012, p.51). This view is dependent upon the belief that poverty is the cause of inequality rather than the outcome of injustice. During the Industrial Revolution workers created enormous wealth for the factory owners; “Many education systems were mainly designed to cope with the demands of mass industrialisation – providing basic skills for the majority and advanced competencies for an elite”, (OECD, 2011, p25). Now, at the start of the twenty-first century, the majority fund the wealth of the minority, “The poorest tenth of people receiving only 1 per cent of total income, while the richest tenth take home 31 per cent” (Oxfam, 2012, p2).

Agreeing with Leach (2009) and Morgan (1996) who question the purpose of ECEC, I believe the agent for change has not been the needs of the child but that of government priority: “Economic prosperity depends on maintaining a high employment/population ratio...Support for the view that early childhood education and care should be seen as *a public good* is growing, and has received a strong impetus from the research of education economists” (OECD, 2006, p.12). Additionally, research shows that contrary to the picture painted by Duncan Smith (DWP, 2012), “61% of children in poverty have working parents” (Save the Children, 2012, p.11).

Torres, (2008) equating young children to “society’s treasures”, considers investment in children from another perspective – that of respect for, and the rights of, the child. Stating that recognition of the importance of children’s early years and education “is still more of an ideal than a reality” Torres (2008, p.13) argues that in the development of educational policy, there is a disregard of the learning that goes on away from school; such learning is not

valued. Torres (2008) draws upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) to argue that children have rights to education that includes “education both in and out of school” (p.14). Article 29 of the UNCRC (OHCHR, 1989) emphasises the breadth of a child’s education, “The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” affirming the holistic nature of a child’s entitlement.

Having worked in the PVI early years sector I am now questioning my role. I believed I was supporting young children but was I propagating the system Foucault (1975/1977) identified, a historian’s dream of a “perfect society” (p.169) – obtained through covert control? Childhood is a social construct (Jenks, 2005; James and James, 2004); I recall my own as a carefree, home centred experience that consequently influenced the childhoods I created for my own children. What ‘childhood legacy’ is being bequeathed to young children who spend the majority of their waking hours in childcare settings? What concept of childhood is being formed that will subsequently impact upon their own children?

7.8. BACK TO THE FUTURE?

Could anything be sadder than to see these children and babies being farmed out at early hours of the morning, taken to these baby farms where they are looked after by uneducated, ignorant so called minders?

(5 live Breakfast, 2012).

In Chapter Two I traced the development of childminders, showing how the profession emerged from a disreputable service. I presented an historical overview stating how important knowledge of the past is when planning future changes (Graseck, 2008; Carr and Hartnett, 1996). I have voiced and endorsed the concerns of participants that childminding is not being protected in the current Ministerial (Truss, 2012b) and Chief Inspectoral

(House of Commons, 2012) proposals that threaten to return childminding to a lowly form of childcare. I will set out my reasons by linking the present to the past.

Current proposals for the reorganisation of the childminder workforce include a change of regulation (Truss, 2012a; 2012b) that includes an increase in the number of children under five that childminders are allowed to care for. Truss is based in Norfolk, a rural county that has difficulties to overcome but with space for children to grow, as has been exemplified in the commentaries of rural childminders in this study. Knowledge and understanding of young children dictate that in another environment, where a single childminder may live on a busy road or in a high-rise tower block, taking five children under five safely away from the home, even to a local facility, is impractical. Consequently, if these proposals were adopted, a researcher may well find conditions similar to those of earlier studies undertaken in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s. Mayall and Petrie (1977) reported that children were seldom taken out from the home setting or had opportunity for outdoor play in a garden or park and recommended that a childminder should care for no more than three children under five including their own. This recommendation, proposed 35 years ago was in a different era as far as volume of traffic is concerned and before the research that highlighted the consequence of poor interaction between adult and child (Bruner, 1980), the need for “lengthy attention to the individual child” (Morgan, 1996) and the importance of sustained shared thinking (Sylva et al., 2004).

The move to centrally regulated and consistent provision has been a factor in bringing together a dispersed group of practitioners; the de-regulation (Truss, 2012a) is likely to fragment a service that is gaining strength by mutual support. All recent research has shown that childminders gain most support from colleagues; current cross-boundary and internet groups where childminders interact with other ECEC practitioners working in group settings would be unsustainable if the proposed changes occurred. Jackson and

Jackson (1979) documented the disastrous results of LAs delivering their own interpretations of requirements. Truss (2012a; 2012b) based the revision of childminder services on the Dutch model, however, research shows that “there is also much evidence to suggest that since 2005 the quality of childcare provision overall has dropped dramatically” (Lloyd, 2012), indicating progress would be reversed.

Proposals affecting early years provision have continued to be announced. Truss (2012b) stated that nurseries should be allowed academy status. Buried in the news on the opening day of the Olympics, July 27th 2012, was an announcement that academies could immediately employ unqualified teachers (Harrison, 2012). There are implications for the programme of raising the qualifications of early years practitioners. If unqualified practitioners are employed, there is the possibility of returning the early years workforce to a lowly status, further impacting upon childminders (Owen and Fauth, 2010).

At the end of 2012, the government announced funding to extend provision for two-year-olds, allocating £5.09 per hour with the recommendation by Truss (DfE, 2012d) that funding is passed on in full “to ensure that high-quality staff are recruited and retained”. The full funding is less than the minimum wage; stating it is “significantly above the market rate of £4.13” (DfE, 2012d) the implication is that a generous investment has been made. The press notice states it is high-quality staff that brings about a child’s progress, therefore contributing to better outcomes and thus recognising the value of quality childcare to society. Research into the value workers contribute to society found that for every £1 paid to a childcare worker, £7 of value is generated, and conversely, “For every £1 in value created, £7 worth of value is destroyed by a highly paid City banker” (New Economics Foundation, 2009, p.15). Noting the expectations of the low-pay early years sector, Ben-Galim (2011) affirmed providers can generate income only from government funding and parental fees (p.28). Truss (DfE, 2012d)

announced, “I am calling on schools, nurseries and childminders to step up to the challenge”; however, the funding allocation does not reflect the responsibility placed upon the sector, nor the value of high-quality practitioners. Childcare functions because practitioners are paid less than those using the service (Jackson and Jackson, 1979). Support for the financial and banking sector, which created the economic crisis, had reached £850b. in December 2009 (National Audit Office, 2009). Employees in this sector earned an average of £12,500 per year bonus (ONS, 2011), higher than the salary which the majority of childminders earn in a year (NCMA, 2011, p.26). Stating, “This Government thinks that your birth should not equal your fate, and critical to that is investing in the Early Years” Teather (DfE, 2010) recognised inequity; however, a comparison between the investments made into the banking and education systems reveals injustice. Teather was replaced by Truss in a cabinet reshuffle in September 2012, signalling a policy shift in the Coalition Government.

The DfE (2011b) has proposed that children’s centres, acknowledged as playing an important role in providing early years services (p.28), should be funded through a payment by results scheme. Research evaluating the pilot scheme has identified difficulties in the judgement criteria as well as modes of collection (National Children’s Bureau, 2011). In 1862 payments by results was introduced through the Revised Code of Regulations (HMSO 1862); schools were awarded funding, which impacted upon monies available to pay staff, according to the results obtained by pupils who were examined by visiting inspectors. Matthew Arnold, the HMI who advocated young children should not attend school unless there were appropriate facilities, such as those in France, reported to Royal Commission in 1886. Asked whether greater efficiency merits more funding, Arnold replied, “No, I do not wish for a money prize for greater efficiency; I wish the school to have the funds necessary for keeping it properly found and properly staffed, without prizes and grants of money besides” (House of Commons, 1886, Q.6080).

Wilshaw, (House of Commons, 2012), has alluded to the removal of childminders from the Ofsted inspection process thus returning to a separation of care from education that existed until the 1980s. Stating the present system is unsustainable, the suggestion is embedded in financial considerations, rather than the well-being of the child. In his Annual Report (Ofsted, 2012), Wilshaw asserts many childminders have had difficulties in providing for the learning and development of children (p.5), suggesting there should be a reassessment of childminders working within the EYFS (p.9), indicating an acceptance of and return to the lowest standard of quality. To effect change, a “levelling up” (Ermisch, 2012, p.17) of provision is required. Wilshaw draws upon research findings to support his argument that children in the UK are less well prepared for school than in the other major English speaking countries, comparing the language of children from the poorest and richest homes (Ofsted, 2012, p.17). The original research, commissioned because of concern of the long-term impact of income inequality, concludes that differences in child outcomes will never be eradicated “especially in highly unequal societies” (Ermisch, 2012, p.18), one of which is the UK, where wage differentials have increased faster than in many OECD countries. Only the USA has a higher differential ratio (Government Equalities Office, 2010). As previously noted, the outcome of poverty is being seen as the problem rather than the inequity.

Separating ‘care’ from ‘education’ will return the concept of early years provision to that which persisted until 2008. Research has not only identified the benefits of combined care and education (Bennett, 2008; OECD, 2000) amongst which are aims set out in government publications (DfE, 2011b; Field, 2010) but also found that separating ‘education’ from ‘care’ can jeopardise the attainment of quality goals (OECD, 2012a). Bennett (2003) asserts, “There is an increasing focus on the educational role of services for very young children, supported by research showing that the first three years of life are extremely important in setting attitudes and patterns of thinking” (p.40). Development and education are the rights of all children (Torres, 2008). Wilshaw’s proposals are at odds with the Rights of the Child,

international policy recommendation, rigorous research findings and the educated thinking that brought about the merging of care and education in England.

Reflecting upon the proposals and having spent many hours in conversation with dedicated childminders who have achieved the highest standards and kept the well-being of the children they care for at the forefront of their practice, I find it disturbing that such an attack can be made on services offered to children and families. Justifying decisions, that will have a crucial impact upon a child's future, on monetary savings as has been the case, is unacceptable:

In the case of manufactured goods, it can be argued that the sale of a cheaper and less perfect product to meet a customer's available budget is fair practice, but the argument has much less validity where the future of a child is concerned. (Bennett, 2003, p.37)

The current Secretary of State for Education posits there is much to be learned from the past (DfE, 2011c), but this thinking is selective and does not extend to home-based childcare. Lessons from the past are being ignored; there is much to be learned from the experience of the childminders in this study who have contributed hugely to the development of quality provision. Their practice reflects an EYFS aspiration, that of a "rich and personalised experience that many parents give their children at home" (DCSF, 2008a, p.09). Those advocating change might consider Hadow's (Board of Education, 1931) counsel:

*What a wise and good parent would desire for his own children,
that a nation must desire for all children (p.xviii).*

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Appendix 2.1: Childminder Timeline.

1872	Infant Life Protection Act.	'...anyone taking in more than one child of less than 12 months, for more than 24 hours and receiving a payment required a licence – a certificate granted "by a justice, clergyman, minister or registered medical practitioner ... after personal investigation into character'.
1885	London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children founded.	Society founded by Benjamin Waugh.
1888	Local Government Act.	Local Authorities established.
1889	Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act.	Commonly known as the 'Children's Charter'.
1891	Elementary Education Act.	Funding is provided for the education of children 'over three'.
1897	Infant Life Protection Act amended.	Local Authorities were given the responsibility of enforcing registration of anyone caring for other peoples' children for remuneration. Local authorities charged to appoint inspectors to enforce the Act.
1904	Five women inspectors commissioned.	These inspectors were charged to examine the position of "children under five years in public elementary schools".
1908	Children Act 1908.	Legislated for the registration of any child under seven cared for by an adult receiving payment and setting out the regulations for fostering, in an attempt to make baby-farming illegal.
1933	Hadow Report.	Reports that 43.1% of all 3 – 5 year olds were attending elementary schools at the turn of the century.
1945	Ministry of Health Circular 221/45.	They [the Ministers] are also of the opinion that, under normal peacetime conditions. The right policy to pursue would be positively to discourage mothers of children under two from going out to work; to make provisions for children between two and five by way of nursery schools and classes; and to regard day nurseries as supplements to meet the special needs

		of children whose mothers are constrained by individual circumstances to go out to work or whose home circumstances are in themselves unsatisfactory from the health point of view or whose mothers are incapable for some good reason of undertaking the full care of their children (Ministry of Health [1945] Circular 221/45. Cited in Moss 1991 pp.121-141).
1948	Nurseries and Child-Minders Regulation Act.	Childminders first noted in legislation. Local health authorities to keep registers of 'persons in their area who for reward receive into their homes children under the age of five to be looked after'. Application had to be made to the health authority that was responsible for ensuring the applicant was a fit person; living in suitable premises; caring children not above a specified number; children were safe from disease. Inspections could be carried out 'against the exposure of the children received in the premises to infectious disease'.
1968	Health Services and Public Health Act.	The health authority had the power to limit the number of children that may be cared for in a person's home. It was the responsibility of the health authority to ensure children were cared for by 'persons adequate in number and in qualifications or experience'; premises and equipment should be safe and adequately maintained; children should be adequately fed, being given a suitable diet; and records should be kept containing information specified by the authority.
1970	Local Authority Social Services Act.	A social services department established in every local authority.
1975	Children Act 1975.	Responsibility for regulation and inspection of nurseries and childminders changed from local health authorities to the social services departments established in 1970.

1977	National Child Minding Association.	Inaugural meeting held.
1981	Children Act 1981.	Local authorities are charged to make provision for children under 5 who have special educational needs. Local authorities may make and maintain a statement of a child's special educational needs for children under 2.
1989	Children Act 1989.	Childminding regulations extended. A childminder is defined as a person looking after one or more children under 8 for reward, for more than 2 hours each day.
1989	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted internationally.	Child rights enshrined in international law.
1992	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.	Signed by the UK in 1990, ratified in 1991, it came into force in 1992.
2000	Care Standards Act.	National Care Standards set out. Ofsted established as a regulatory body.
2000	Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage.	A non-statutory framework for 3 – 6 year olds published.
2001	Day Care and Child Minding (Inspections) (Prescribed Matters) (England) Regulations 2001.	Responsibility for regulating and inspecting childminders moved from individual local authorities with separate criteria to one regulating body. Regulation and inspection based on National Care Standards transferred to Ofsted.
2002	2002 Education Act.	Childminders, along with other practitioners, to undergo Criminal Investigation checks.
2002	Birth to Three Matters.	A non-statutory framework supporting children in their first years.
2003	Laming report published.	The recommendations from the report precipitated a reform in children's services.
2004	Every Child Matters. Change for Children.	Set out a national framework for a cohesive service enabling every child to achieve his/her full potential, irrespective of individual circumstances. The framework is based on five outcomes, being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic well-being.

2004	Children Act 2004.	Proposals from Every Child Matters taken forward into legislation. An office of Children's Commissioner established to promote awareness of the views and interests of children in England, with particular regard to the five outcomes and the UNCRC.
2005	Day Care and Child Minding (Inspections) (Prescribed Matters) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2005.	Early Years inspection aligned with school inspection; Childcare providers are able to achieve an 'outstanding' judgement from an inspection.
2006	Childcare Act 2006.	Duty placed on local authorities to improve the well-being of young children and reduce inequalities; ensure there is sufficient childcare for parents, enabling them to work or undertake training leading to work; encourage parents to take advantage of early childhood services that might be of benefit to them and their young children. The Act introduced the Early Years Foundation Stage, combining and building on Birth to Three Matters, Foundation Stage and national standards for under 8s day care and childminding in order to support providers in delivering high quality integrated early education and care for children from birth to age 5.
2007	Early Years Professional Status.	A graduate level professional accreditation programme for leading practitioners introduced which is the only Government-endorsed accreditation for the Early Years workforce.
2008	Early Years Foundation Stage.	September 2008, EYFS introduced; the first statutory framework combining care and learning for all children from birth to the academic year in which they turn five. The EYFS became mandatory for all schools and early years providers in Ofsted registered settings.

Appendix 3.1: Participant information sheet.

I am studying at the University of Sheffield and am completing a Doctorate of Education. As part of my work I am researching the following subject:

Early Years Childcare Provision in Rural Local Authorities in England: An examination of factors that support childminders in the development of a quality service.

The aim of my investigation is explained in the following passage:

This proposed research study will examine the premise that ‘All types of (Early Years) providers have the potential to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage to an excellent standard’ (DfES, 2007, p.09). The previous government’s objective that every child receives the best possible start in life and is ‘able to fulfil their full potential’ (DfES, 2004, p. 2) is an honourable aspiration and should be the over-riding intention of anyone who works for and with children and young people, however I contend that achieving this aim is likely to be fraught with difficulties. This study will therefore investigate factors that influence the delivery of a quality early years service, focusing on the work of childminders and in particular those living in rural areas.

I have chosen to examine this sector of the early years workforce as my professional roles during the past six and a half years have raised my awareness of the differing organisational structures for Early Years provision. As my work has taken me into different Local Authorities I have become conscious of the variation in organisation and the effect I perceive it has on practitioners. I have discovered that of all the members of the early years workforce, the structure for supporting childminders has varied enormously and I would like to research their situation in particular.

It is my intention that the study makes a practical contribution to the Early Years’ discourse by identifying factors that have made a positive impact on developing and improving practice.

In my work I shall adhere to the guidance of the British Educational Research Association (<http://www.bera.ac.uk/>) and will ensure participants know why they are being asked to take part in the study, how the information will be used and how it will be reported; that they have the right to withdraw from the project at any time; that all UNESCO Rights of the Child will be adhered to for any child present in the home of a participant; participants will be offered the opportunity of reviewing information before it is made public.

My research adheres to the University of Sheffield School of Education ethical guidelines and I have committed to:

1. Abide by the University's Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue':
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/07/21/15/Tissue.doc>
2. Abide by the University's 'Good Research Practice Standards':
www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/03/25/82/collatedGRP.pdf

If at any time participants feel they have any questions or concerns about the research, issues will be addressed initially by the researcher, or if more serious, by the research supervisor, who is Professor Cathy Nutbrown.

Lesley Evans

16th October 2011

L.Evans@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 3.2: Local authority information sheet and letter.

Information Sheet:

I am studying at the University of Sheffield and am completing a Doctorate of Education. As part of my work I am researching the following subject:

Early Years' Provision in Rural Areas of England: An examination of factors that support practitioners in developing an excellent service.

My sources of evidence originally was planned to be through interviews with Early Years Practitioners, using telephone conversations and where appropriate face-to-face interviews; documenting practice through photographs and observations; focus group interviews and data collection from rural Local Authorities. However, initial research and literature review has revealed some interesting information that I would like to develop further and so I am intending to extend my work by:

- Including all Local Authorities in my data collection
- Interviewing 'older' people for their child care recollections.

The aim of my investigation is explained in the following passage:

This proposed research study will examine the premise that 'All types of (Early Years) providers have the potential to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage to an excellent standard' (DfES, 2007, p.09). This Government's objective that every child receives the best possible start in life and is 'able to fulfil their full potential' (DfES, 2004, p. 2) is an honourable aspiration and should be the over-riding intention of anyone who works for and with children and young people, however I contend that achieving this aim is likely to be fraught with difficulties. This study will therefore investigate factors that influence the delivery of a quality early years service, focusing on the work of childminders and in particular those living in rural areas.

I have chosen to examine this sector of the early years workforce as my professional roles during the past four and a half years have raised my awareness of the differing organisational structures for Early Years provision. As my work has taken me into different Local Authorities I have become conscious of the variation in organisation and the effect I perceive it has on

practitioners. I have discovered that of all the members of the early years workforce, the structure for supporting childminders has varied enormously and I would like to research their situation in particular.

It is my intention that the study makes a practical contribution to the Early Years' discourse by identifying factors that have made a positive impact on developing and improving practice.

In my work I shall adhere to the guidance of the British Educational Research Association (<http://www.bera.ac.uk/>) and will ensure participants know why they are being asked to take part in the study, how the information will be used and how it will be reported; that they have the right to withdraw from the project at any time; that all UNESCO Rights of the Child will be adhered to for any child present in the home of a participant; participants will be offered the opportunity of reviewing information before it is made public.

My research adheres to the University of Sheffield School of Education ethical guidelines and I have committed to:

3. Abide by the University's Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue':
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/07/21/15/Tissue.doc>

4. Abide by the University's 'Good Research Practice Standards':
www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/03/25/82/collatedGRP.pdf

If at any time participants feel they have any questions or concerns about the research, issues will be addressed initially by the researcher, or if more serious, by the research supervisor, who is Professor Cathy Nutbrown.

Lesley Evans

5th August 2009

L.Evans@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear

I am a student at the University of Sheffield and am currently gathering data for my Doctoral Thesis, the focus of which is the identification of factors that support childminders in developing quality provision.

I am examining a variety of influences that might impact upon a childminder's practice and researching Local Authority support is one aspect of the data gathering process. In this particular aspect of my study I am intending to explore and identify any links between support offered by LAs and quality childminder practice.

I understand that you have a very busy schedule; however, I would appreciate if you could find the time to complete the attached questionnaire. All information will remain anonymous and results will be anonymised before analysis.

The ethics of my research is underpinned by Sheffield University School of Education research approval procedure and I have complied with the requirements. There is a file containing further information attached to this email.

If you are able to help in this way, please can the questionnaire be returned to my student email account - L.Evans@sheffield.ac.uk - by September 7th 2009? Questions about my research and the data gathered can be sent to the same email address.

Kind regards

Lesley Evans

Appendix 3.3: Childminder permission agreement form.

Title of Project:

Early Years Childcare Provision in Rural Local Authorities in England: An examination of factors that support childminders in the development of a quality service.

Name of Researcher: Lesley Evans

I have received information about the research project prior to the telephone interview.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet, dated 16th October 2011, for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. (Contact: 01778 342076)
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis
4. By voluntarily talking with Lesley on the phone, I agree to take part in the above research project

*

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Lesley Evans Researcher	16 th October 2011 Date	<i>Lesley Evans</i> Signature

Appendix 3.4: Key words used for Ofsted document analysis.

Element title	Words included in the search
Knowledge and understanding of professional requirements	
Knowledge and understanding of policy, practice and guidance	Knowledge; understanding; Early Years Foundation Stage; EYFS; child development; development; learning;
Knowledge of statutory requirements	Safeguarding; safeguard; Child Protection; security; contact; visit;
Health and safety	Health; safety; safe; secure; accidents; risk assessment; welfare; hazards.
Links with other professionals	Professionals; settings; partnership; providers; agencies; special needs; SEN; individual needs; additional needs;
Appropriate policy and procedures	Policies; procedures; document; policy; organised; organisation;
Effective practice	
Safe, welcome. environment	Safe; welcome; environment; confident; secure; emotional well-being; settle; emotional well-being;
Children progress, potential achieved	Progress; potential
Individual needs met	Individual; needs. routines;
Planning and observation for next steps	Individual, plan; observation; assessment; next steps; needs; routines
Child-led indoor and outdoor activities	Child led; child-led; child initiated; adult led; indoor; outdoor; interest;
Promotes equality and inclusion	Equality; inclusion; diversity, difficulties; equal opportunity
Promotes communication skills	Language; communication; interaction; speak; talk; chat; vocabulary; word; thought; thinking; engagement; sign;
Promotes positive behaviour	Behaviour; role model; rule; manner; wrong; right;
Relationships with children	
Relationships with children	Relationships; supportive; trusting; sensitive; caring; warm;
Involving children in decisions	Include; involve; voice, listen; value; view; decision; collaborate;
Demonstrate positive values	Positive; values; role; model; respect; each other; attitude; behaviour; example; adult;
Relationships with families/carers	
Recognise family contribution	Recognise; respect; family; contribution; families; sharing; parents;
Trusting, effective relationships	Trust; relationship; parent; carer; communicate; communication; work; partnership;
Opportunities to share information	Provide; opportunities; share; information; parents;
Training, qualifications, professional and personal development.	
Training	Training; course; First aid; network
CPD	Continuing professional development; CPD; own knowledge development; personal development;
Holds L2 qual.	Level 2; 2
Holds L3 qual.	Level 3; 3
Holds L4 qual.	Level 4; 4
Qual. teacher	Teacher
EYPS	Early Years Professional; EYP;
Commitment to improve	Improvement; monitoring; action plan; Self evaluation; evaluation; self evaluates; reflective practice; reflection; reflects on own practice; reflecting;

Appendix 3.5: Analysis of an Ofsted report using colour coding.

The childminder registered in 2005. She lives with her partner and son in . The whole of the property is included in the registration and minding takes place mainly in the hall and designated childminding room. The garden is currently being re-designed for outside play. The family has two horses, two dogs and two cats.

The childminder is registered by Ofsted on the Early Years Register and both the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register. She may care for a maximum of six children under eight years at any one time, of whom no more than three may be in the early years age group. She is currently minding two children in this age group. She may also offer care for children up to 11 years of age.

Overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is 'outstanding'. The childminder provides a wonderful learning environment which is welcoming and attractive to all age groups and offers children exceptionally good opportunities to learn as they play. The childminder works closely with parents and carers to build a strong partnership and ensure that her service meets their children's needs. She uses her in-depth knowledge of each child to promote their welfare, learning and development to the highest standards. She has established an effective system for self-evaluation and reflects on all aspects of her practice in order to produce detailed plans for additions to extend and improve her childminding.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

practising the emergency evacuation procedure with minded children.

The leadership and management of the early years provision

The childminder demonstrates her commitment to setting and achieving exemplary standards for her service by organising routines, documentation, activities and the children's play environment very well. She has designated one large downstairs room for childminding with adjoining space for eating and messy play. This has en suite toilet and washing facilities. There is a wealth of resources to cover all age ranges and activities across the six areas of learning. These are stored in open access baskets, trays, shelves and book storage so that children may select them independently. Wall decorations such as posters, home made feely boards and interactive toys are at the right height for children. A travel cot is permanently set up in the room enabling children to remain within the childminder's eyesight while they sleep. The childminder uses her risk assessment and comprehensive self-evaluation procedures to continually monitor her service. She reflects on the success of activities and resources and adapts her environment and routines to suit individual children. She values feedback from parents and children and makes intelligent assessments which inform future plans. It is evident that she has

implemented her reviewing procedures since she moved to her new home in the summer of 2008. Since then she has not only set up the playroom as **an excellent learning environment** for the children but also continued to review the use of her outdoor space. She has gained funding from the local authority to make improvements to the garden and is designing a specific play area for minded children with fencing and areas for **outdoor play and exploration**. She has a wish list of ideas and improvements which will add to the already impressive service that she offers. The childminder has addressed the one issue raised at her last inspection which has resulted in an improvement to children's hand washing routines.

The childminder values the close partnership she establishes with parents in order to meet the individual needs of their children. She uses a regular exchange of verbal feedback to inform daily routines and shares extensive records of information with parents. She is aware that she does not always get to see all parents and carers on a regular basis and visits them in their own home in order to share her written assessments, records and photographs. They are invited to spend time at her home to become familiar with her policies and procedures, and to understand how she will be using the Early Years Foundation Stage to inform the care of their children. Display boards and posters provide extra information to parents.

Children are safeguarded well as the childminder has a very good knowledge and understanding of her role and responsibilities regarding child protection. She has taught early years providers to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse in her previous role as a lecturer in early years. She has an up to date copy of the Local Safeguarding Children Board guidelines on file.

The quality and standards of the early years provision

Children benefit from being cared for by a skilled childminder who uses her knowledge and understanding of how they learn and grow to provide excellent levels of care which are appropriate to their ages and stages of development. She is using all the themes and principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage to tailor her provision for them. It is evident that she has established a working system of planning and assessment which includes valuable evaluations in order to build in challenges as the next steps for children. For example, after noting a child's interest in tactile play, she designed specific play resources, such as feely boards, and introduced opportunities for messy play with jelly and porridge oats to extend their experiences and learning. She records fully in daily diaries and links children's activities, routines and achievements to the six areas of learning. These are illustrated further by use of annotated photos in children's individual folders and scrapbooks. It is already evident from her records that a clear picture of children's interests and progress is emerging. The stimulating play environment enables children to access games, toys and other resources to extend their physical skills, develop their creativity and promote language development. Children enjoy exploring treasure baskets, making noises with milk carton shakers, moving and dancing to music, and looking at books. The childminder supports play well, making lots of eye contact with children, chatting and talking and using praise and smiles to

help them to bond with her and to feel happy to play. She uses music and singing to create a relaxed and comfortable environment. There are opportunities for children to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world via everyday play and access to resources such as picture books, dolls and play figures which illustrate social and cultural diversity. Long term plans are flexible to allow children to become aware of their locality, the changing seasons and customs which are relevant for them.

The childminder has an excellent knowledge of the welfare requirements and her commitment to providing a safe and secure environment is demonstrated via her risk assessment procedures, both written and practical. She makes thorough daily checks of her home and has written assessments for regular outings, such as the toddler group. A comprehensive emergency evacuation plan has been devised and written. The childminder has identified, as part of her self-evaluation, that this has not yet been practised with minded children. There are measures in place to safeguard children such as radiator guards, gates to fence off the kitchen from the front hall, and use of non-slip socks and slippers for children. She is assessing her outside space in order to make best use of a recent grant for improving her garden and ensures that children's safety is paramount when outdoors. All records for incidents, accidents and administration of medication are correct and shared with parents. Children are learning about a healthy lifestyle as the childminder models very good hygiene routines. Children are learning to wash their hands after messy play and before eating. They have access to individual flannels and towels for hand drying. Parents provide main meals and the childminder provides healthy snacks. She promotes healthy eating as part of her service and adheres to children's dietary requirements. She is aware of the need for scrupulous hygiene when storing and preparing milk feeds and baby foods. Children's minor accidents are dealt with effectively as the childminder has attended a paediatric first aid course. She is booked on an update in February 2009.

Appendix 4.1: Questionnaire sent to each English Local Authority.

Question		
1	Name of Local Authority	
2	Name of respondent	
3	Number of registered childminders	
4	How many childminders are working towards a Level 3 qualification?	
5	How many childminders have a Level 3 qualification?	
6	How many childminders are working towards a degree qualification?	
7	Number of childminders with a degree qualification?	
8	Number of childminders working towards EYP status.	
9	How many childminders have achieved EYP status?	
10	Is there a person/persons solely responsible for childminder support?	
11	Is childminder support provided directly by an employee/s of the LA?	
12	If not, is childminder support provided through a service agreement?	
13	If so, which agency supplies childminder support services?	
14	Equivalent fulltime support of personnel providing support?	
15	Do you have a system of childminder networks?	
16	If so, for how long have the networks been established?	
17	Who co-ordinates the networks?	
18	What are the network membership requirements for childminders?	
19	How often do the networks meet?	
20	What is the purpose of the meetings? (Peer support/training etc)	
21	If a mixture, what percentage of support/training/other meetings are held?	
22	Is there a LA Quality Standards Award that childminders can achieve?	
23	What support is offered for childminders to achieve this?	

24	If not, what support is offered for childminders to achieve the NCMA Quality Award?	
25	Are there any opportunities for sharing of best practice between childminders e.g. peer mentoring, shadowing, cross setting visiting etc?	
26	Is there LA online support dedicated to childminders?	
27	If yes, what is the web address?	
28	Is this clearly signposted from the LA Home page?	
29	Can it be reached in 3 or less 'clicks' from the LA home page?	
30	Guidance/information on the site: 'How to become a childminder'?	
31	Details of Introductory, First Aid and Child Protection courses?	
32	On-line directory of courses?	
33	Childminder newsletter?	
34	What other information for childminders is available on line?	
35	What is the web address for the newsletter?	
36	Is all information produced in a hard copy format?	
37	How do childminders without internet access receive information?	
38	Any other relevant information that clarifies the LA support available to childminders:	

Appendix 4.2: Local authority childminder statistics – qualifications.

Ordered according to percentage of Ofsted 'outstanding' judgements.

DEFRA category	Questionnaire identification number	No of registered childminders	Working towards Level 3	Holding Level 3	Working towards a degree	Holding a degree	Working towards EYP status	Holding EYP status
2	Q3	108	4	55	5	1	1	0
3	Q19	91	8	28	2	1	0	0
1	Q23	302	?	2	?	?	2	2
2	Q34	181	102	89	11	3	2	0
6	Q11	811	29	210	7	51	7	2
2	Q35	179	?	?	?	?	?	?
1	Q20	286	10	90	1	3	0	1
2	Q5	290	?	?	?	?	2	3
1	Q9	550	Funded 86		Funded 15		?	?
6	Q32	800	/	/	/	/	/	/
2	Q40	298	49	36	4	4	1	1
2	Q4	286	/	/	/	/	1	/
6	Q13	348	81	116	15	3	5	1
6	Q31	370	?	?	?	?	?	?
4	Q45	510	?	94	?	16	?	2
3	Q12	361	59	108	14	15	1	0
2	Q42	230	/	/	/	/	/	0
6	Q28	768	44	218	24	6	7	1
6	Q30	554	94	282	11	28	11	11
4	Q7	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
4	Q15	420	169		15		2	1
3	Q43	220	21	9	0	1	0	1
1	Q2	878	/	260	?	?	?	4

6	Q6	816	34	?	7	/	/	2
2	Q36	298	14	38	5	5	0	1
4	Q25	829	58	193	23	21	6	1
3	Q29	93	4	45	4	3	0	0
3	Q33	233	?	?	7	5	0	1
1	Q16	150-200	/	/	/	/	/	/
1	Q22	81	1	23	2	0 EY	0	0
1	Q26	240	/	99	/	3	/	/
1	Q38	150	6	90	6	3	0	0
1	Q41	455	52	48	6	9	0	0
5	Q14	289	?	?	?	?	?	?
1	Q24	945	CWDC misinformed some CMs that their L1 was equivalent to L3		8	Estimated approx 60	Estimated approx 37	1
1	Q39	170	/	/	/	/	0	0
2	Q8	364	?	?	15	5	2	1
1	Q27	396	28	47	22	6	?	1
6	Q10	698	78	141	26	4	1	0
3	Q1	180	20	74	5	3	2	0
3	Q44	295	8	41	5	7	0	0
1	Q18	198	25	33	0	2	0	0
1	Q21	440	6	60	7	1	0	0
6	Q37	35	14	18	2	1	0	0
3	Q17	120	/	/	/	/	/	/

Appendix 4.3: Local authority statistics – organisation of personnel support for childminders.

Ordered according to percentage of Ofsted 'outstanding' judgements.

DEFRA category	Questionnaire identification number	No of registered childminders	Person with sole responsibility for childminders	Equivalent of full-time support	Ratio of support worker: childminder
2	Q3	108	Yes	?	N/A
3	Q19	91	Yes	1	1:91
1	Q23	302	Yes	1.5	1:201
2	Q34	181	No	3	1:60
6	Q11	811	Yes	11	1:74
1	Q20	286	Yes	?	N/A
2	Q35	179	Yes	1.8	1:99
2	Q5	290	Yes	?	N/A
1	Q9	550	Yes	8	1:69
6	Q32	<i>Approx 800</i>	Yes	?	N/A
2	Q40	298	No	3.5	1:85
2	Q4	286	Yes	2	1:143
3	Q12	361	Yes	?	N/A
6	Q13	348	Yes	5.5	1:63
5/6	Q31	370	Yes	Integrated within job role	
2	Q42	230	Yes	1.2	1:192
4	Q45	510	Yes	4.5	1:113
1	Q2	878	No	50	1:17.5
4	Q7	/	Yes	1	N/A
4	Q15	420	Yes	8	1:53
6	Q28	768	Yes	17	1:45

6	Q30	554	Yes	6	1:92
3	Q43	220	Yes	0.8	1:220 equivalent to 1:275
6	Q6	816	Yes	7.2	1:113
2	Q36	298	Yes	1	1:298
1	Q16	150-200	Yes	1 person who supports all childcare provision	
1	Q22	81	No	?	N/A
4	Q25	829	No	16 for all childcare provision	
1	Q26	240	Yes	1 F/T 22 P/T	?
3	Q29	93	Yes	4.5	1:21
3	Q33	Approx 233	Yes	1.5	1:155
1	Q38	Approx 150	Yes	3	1:50
1	Q41	455	Yes	10	1:46
5	Q14	289	Yes	?	N/A
1	Q24	Approx 945	No	11.3	1:84
1	Q39	170	Yes	1	1:170
2	Q8	364	Yes	4	1:91
1	Q27	396	Yes	6	1:66
3	Q1	180	No	5	1:36
6	Q10	698	No further information		
1	Q18	198	Yes	5.5	1:36
1	Q21	Approx 440	Yes	2	1:220
3	Q44	295	Yes	1.8	1:164
3	Q17	120	Yes	2	1:60
6	Q37	35	Yes	?	N/A
	Approx. Total	16341		66.6	1:187

Appendix 4.4: Local authority statistics – Network support schemes for childminders.

Ordered according to percentage of Ofsted ‘outstanding’ judgements.

DEFRA category	Questionnaire identification number	No of registered childminders	Networks in place	Number of years established	number of meetings per year	Responsibility for network	Network membership requirements	Purpose of network meetings	Content of network meetings	Opportunities for best practice sharing
2	Q3	108	Yes	?	6	Development workers	CMs complete initial assessment and are observed to see if NCMA QA standards are met	Peer support; informal support; topical training	Clusters – 50% support, 50% training; training events – 70% training 30% support	Delivering presentations; CM examples of best practice displayed in training rooms
3	Q19	91	Yes	1.5	6	Children’s centre community involvement worker	In children’s centre locality	Peer support; developing children’s centre support	Within children’s centres; training available to childminders from the LA	?
1	Q23	302	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Drop-ins; support CM scheme
2	Q34	181	Yes	11	Weekly	Service Provider	Meets QA requirements; L3; meets local requirements	Peer support; training; drop-ins	Weekly drop-ins; Monthly training; Quarterly peer to peer support	Yes

6	Q11	811	Yes	9	3	Through Service Provider	All are members; can work towards L2 or L3	Support; taster training; gain knowledge	Detailed training programme to progress levels	Only through informal arrangements
1	Q20	286	Yes	6	?	Childminder co-ordinator	Meets Service Provider requirements	Training	?	?
2	Q35	179	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2 childminders invited to registration
2	Q5	290	Yes	4	6	Childminding manager	L3 plus assessment visit; agree to 15 hours training per year and additional if legislated	Peer support; meet with co-ordinator; EY team support	?	CMs bring examples of good practice to half-termly drop-ins.
1	Q9	550	Yes	9	0 Do not meet	Development officers	L3 or working towards; meeting Quality Charter	Visited at home weekly; Stay and Play	Support; modelling practice	Best Practice forum; Peer mentoring; Links to CC
6	Q32	Approx 800	Yes	5	0	Service Provider	Assessment of high standard; CPD; monitoring and unannounced visits; 16 hours training; attendance at drop-ins	?	?	Through Service provider groups and peer support
2	Q40	298	Yes	8	4	Service Provider and LA	Meets QA requirements;	Training	10% support 50% training	Support new CM scheme
2	Q4	286	Yes	7	6	Named person	Completion of initial assessment; Minding for 1 year; Working towards L3	Training and buddy support; general and EY team support	Members offered training before CMs in general	Buddy scheme

3	Q12	361	Yes	4	4	CCF Co-ordinator; CM support co-ordinator	Adhere to CCF criteria; At least 1 year CM; Ofsted – good or above; agree to additional training	Training; support; information sharing; social events; conferences	50% training 50% support	Mentors share best practice at drop-in sessions; Mentors support less confident or weaker CMs
6	Q13	348	Yes	9	12	Service Provider; LA QA coordinator	L3 or working towards; attend 4 training sessions per year; attend monthly QA meetings; annual review and unannounced visits	Peer support; contact with LA and Service Provider advisors; promoting training and children's centre integration	75% support 25% training	Peer mentoring scheme; visits to other settings
5/6	Q31	370	Yes	3	6	Childcare consultant	Meets QA requirements;	Peer support; training; networking updates	50% training 50% support	Through local networks
2	Q42	230	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4	Q45	510	Yes	6	3	Team manager	L3; 2 years CM experience; good or 'outstanding' Ofsted	Updates; training; teacher input	Unknown; CMs can attend LA training	N/A
1	Q2	878	Yes	5	Varies	Service Provider QA Coordinator; Non-CCF – 3 rd sector organises	CCF – QA participation; undertake L3; attend training and meetings. Non CCF – training and meetings; make links to children's centres	Training	Varies	Network groups; Area forum; mentoring

4	Q7	/	Yes	1-3	Varies	Childminder co-ordinators	None at moment; plans for working towards accreditation	Peer support; meet with co-ordinator; share practice; meet co-ordinator	Peer support; paperwork and planning	Drop-in sessions; peer support workshops; home monitoring visits
4	Q15	420	Yes	16	12	Childcare manager of Area CM co-ordinator	Meet LA QA; L3; meet EYFS guidelines	Drop-ins	?	At meetings
6	Q28	768	Yes	9	6-8	Childminding Matters co-ordinator	Service Provider QA requirements; 3 days CPD yearly; agreement to regular assessment and monitoring	Peer support; training; updates; modelling practice	50% with children present	Support meetings; setting visits; Termly CM news sheet
6	Q30	554	Yes	6	To meet local needs	CM support officers	L3; good/'outstanding' or satisfactory with support; 1 st level of LA QA	?	?	At cluster meetings - peer support
3	Q43	220	Yes	6	3	0-5 Lead Officer	Meets QA requirements;	Peer support; training; updates	40 % training; 60% updates and support	Buddy support; informal drop-ins
6	Q6	816	Yes	10	Varies	Service provider development officers	Have good or above Ofsted judgement; hold or working towards L3; complete initial assessment	Varies	CM support sessions; Network specific if needed	Peer support at CM groups
2	Q36	298	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Photographs; setting visits; mentoring scheme

1	Q16	150-200	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1	Q22	81	Yes	6	3	EY consultant	L3 and completion of SEF	Training; updates; support	Training 33.3% updates 33.3% support 33.3%	Peer mentoring and visits
4	Q25	829	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1	Q26	240	Yes	10	4	Co-ordinator in LA team	Service Provider QA; evidence of CPD; attendance at evening meetings and drop-ins	Peer support; mentor support; training; future planning	Identified purposes split	Drop-ins - informal
3	Q29	93	Yes	6	6	Network manager	QA and Code of Conduct	Training; peer support; teacher input	20% training 20% peer support 40 % support	Informally
3	Q33	Approx 233	Yes	6	12	Service Provider	Meets QA requirements;	Peer support; training	50% training 50% support	?
1	Q38	Approx 150	Yes	6	10	Respondent	Assessment open for all; Only 40 allowed membership	Peer support; training	60% 40%	Experienced childminder attends registration course; Informal groups
1	Q41	455	Yes	2	12	Network Co-ordinator	Satisfactory or above; meets QA requirements;	Peer support; training	70% 30%	Buddy scheme; informal drop-ins
5	Q14	289	Yes	8-10	6	Childcare development co-ordinators	Holding or working towards L3	Peer support; training	50% support 50% training	At half-termly meetings

1	Q24	Approx 945	Yes	7	3	Service Provider Co-ordinator	L3; Service Provider QA; commitment to CPD; attendance at meetings; visits every 6-8 weeks; annual review	Peer support; training; updates; consultation	Peer support 25% training 25% updates 25% consultation 25%	Network meetings
1	Q39	170	Yes	6	On demand	Named person	Informal networks; no membership requirements	Peer support; contact with CM Co-ordinator	Mainly support; 3 training meetings	?
2	Q8	364	Yes	3	3	Childminder support team	Good Ofsted grading; attend regular training	Training and support	70% training; 30% support	Buddies scheme
1	Q27	396	Yes	7	4-6	Team manager and 3 network co-ordinators	Service Provider QA requirements	Peer support; updates; EYFS	80% QA; 20% training	Informally at meetings
3	Q1	180	Yes	7	9	2 Network managers; 2 Network Co-ordinators.	NCMA CCF; L3; CM 1 yr; 9 training event attendances	Networking; training; discussions of new initiatives	3 SEN 3 EY 3 general	No
6	Q10	698	No further information available							
1	Q18	198	Yes	4	6	Respondent	?	Information sharing; advice; support; decisions	Held within children's centres	Childminder support scheme
1	Q21	Approx 440	Yes	N/A	6	Network co-ordinator	Assessment by Network co-ordinator	Training; peer support	Training 50% support 50%	Drop-ins

3	Q44	295	Yes	5	12	Cm Support Officer	Undertaking QA requirements;	Training; peer support	Combined in meetings	Informal at meetings and drop-ins
3	Q17	120	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Drop-in groups at children's centres
6	Q37	35	Yes	4	3	Childcare development officer	Experienced CM; working towards L3	Networking; peer support; training; updates	100% training	CM cluster groups; support scheme for new CMs

Appendix 4.5: Local authority statistics – quality assurance schemes.

Ordered according to percentage of Ofsted ‘outstanding’ judgements.

DEFRA category	Questionnaire identification number	No of registered childminders	LA quality assurance Scheme	Support to complete Award	Other QA scheme	Support to complete Award
2	Q3	108	LA	Training; resources; home visits; mentoring; support from NCMA dev. worker	NCMA	Training; resources; home visits; mentoring; support from NCMA dev. worker
3	Q19	91	/		NCMA until 2008	
1	Q23	302	/		NCMA	Bursary funding; CM development Advisor support
2	Q34	181	/		NCMA	Briefing; Eve. support surgeries
6	Q11	811	Yes 3 levels FCCERS	Annual visits; network support meetings		
1	Q20	286	Basic Skills Quality Mark		NCMA	3 networks of 20 CMs; each supported for 18 hours
2	Q35	179	LA	Personal mentor	/	
2	Q5	290	/		NCMA	Co-ordinator visits; telephone; email
1	Q9	550	/		No demand	

6	Q32	<i>Approx 800</i>	/		/	
2	Q40	298	/		NCMA	Financial incentive; development support
2	Q4	286	/		/	
3	Q12	361	/		NCMA	Mentors funded to achieve QF
6	Q13	348	LA	Self- reflective modules; session and phone support;	NCMA	Self-reflective modules; session and phone support
6	Q31	370	LA	Support sessions		
2	Q42	230	/		/	
4	Q45	510	Healthy Early Years	Support by Quality Officer	/	
1	Q2	878	/		NCMA	Training; mentoring; support from NCMA dev. worker
4	Q7	/	/		/	
4	Q15	420	LA	Monthly support	/	
6	Q28	768	/		/	
6	Q30	554	LA	Complete a module; mentor support	/	
3	Q43	220	/		NCMA	Limited as team only able to visit 5 times each year; only 40 CMs allowed

6	Q6	816	LA	3-4 visits to complete Framework; action plan; visit prior to Ofsted inspection	NCMA	NCMA support
2	Q36	298	/		NCMA	Funding
1	Q16	150-200	LA	Monthly workshops; individual visits	/	
1	Q22	81	/		/	
4	Q25	829	/		/	
1	Q26	240	/		NCMA	Co-ordinator
3	Q29	93	LA	Home visits by Co-ordinator	NCMA	Home visits by Co-ordinator
3	Q33	Approx 233	/		NCMA	/
1	Q38	Approx 150	/		NCMA	4 visits each year; email/phone access to co-ordinator; access to EY team ; offer of support visits
1	Q41	455	/		NCMA	Follow NCMA guidelines
5	Q14	289			NCMA	Any help needed
1	Q24	Approx 945	/		NCMA	NCMA network Co-ordinator visit/support
1	Q39	170	/		/	
2	Q8	364	/		NCMA	Funding; workshops; celebratory events
1	Q27	396	/		NCMA	3 network co-ordinators

3	Q1	180	No		NCMA	Funding; training; support group
6	Q10	698	/		/	
1	Q18	198	LA	Monthly workshops		
1	Q21	<i>Approx 440</i>	/		NCMA	Funding; Childcare advisors support
3	Q44	295	/		NCMA	Funding; network support
3	Q17	120	/		NCMA	2 Development officers
6	Q37	35	/		NCMA	Development officers

Appendix 4.6: Analysis of Ofsted inspection reports.

	EYFS Statutory and non-statutory requirements					Effective practice								Relationship with children			Relationship with parents/carers			Qualifications and training							
	K and U of how children learn	Statutory requirements	Health and Safety	Links with other professionals	Appropriate policies and procedures	Safe welcoming environment	Children progress, achieve potential	Individual routines and needs met	Knows individual interests	Observes and plans for next steps	Child led indoor/outdoor activities	Promotes communication skills	Promotes positive behaviour	Promotes equality and inclusion	Trusting, sensitive relationships	Involves children in decisions	Models positive values	Recognises family contribution	Trusting, effective relationships	Opportunity to share information	Training	L2	L3	L4	Degree	EYP	Reflective / Commitment to improve
1																											
2																											
3																											
4																											
5																											
6																											

7	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Blue	White	Blue	Purple	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	Yellow	Yellow	White	Yellow	
8	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Green	Blue	White	Blue	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
9	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	White	White	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Blue	White	Blue	Purple	Purple	Purple	White	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
10	Red	Red	Red	White	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	White	Blue	Blue	Blue	White	Purple	White	Yellow	White	Yellow	White	White	Yellow	
11	Red	Red	Red	White	Red	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Blue	Blue	White	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
12	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Blue	White	Blue	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
13	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Blue	White	Blue	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
14	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Blue	White	Blue	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
15	Red	Red	Red	White	White	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Blue	White	White	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
16	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Green	Blue	White	White	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
17	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	White	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Blue	White	White	Purple	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
18	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Green	White	White	Blue	Blue	White	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
19	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	White	Blue	White	Blue	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
20	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Blue	White	White	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	Yellow	Yellow	White	Yellow

21	Red	Red	Red	White	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Blue	White	Blue	Purple	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
22	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	White	White	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Blue	White	White	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
23	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	White	Blue	White	White	White	Purple	Purple	White	White	Yellow	White	White	Yellow	
24	Red	Red	Red	White	Red	Green	White	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Blue	Blue	Blue	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	Yellow	White	White	Yellow	
25	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	White	Green	Blue	White	Blue	Purple	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
26	Red	Red	Red	White	Red	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Blue	Blue	White	Purple	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
27	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	White	White	Blue	White	Blue	Purple	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
28	Red	Red	Red	White	Red	White	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	White	Blue	White	White	Purple	Purple	Purple	White	White	Yellow	White	White	Yellow	
29	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	White	Blue	Blue	Blue	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
30	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	White	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Blue	Blue	Blue	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
31	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Green	White	White	Green	Blue	Blue	Blue	Purple	Purple	Purple	Yellow	Yellow	White	Yellow	Yellow	White	Yellow
32	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	White	White	Blue	White	White	Purple	Purple	White	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
33	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	White	Blue	White	Blue	White	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	
34	Red	Red	Red	Red	White	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	White	Blue	Blue	White	Purple	Purple	Purple	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Yellow	

100	34	
100	34	
100	34	
71	24	
88	30	
76	26	
60	20	
100	34	
74	25	
100	34	
100	34	
79	27	
62	21	
56	19	
100	34	
26	9	
53	18	
35	12	
100	34	
94	32	
91	31	
1	3	
23	8	
1	3	
11	4	
6	2	
100	34	

Appendix 5.1: Childminder interview schedule.

Time	Name:	Phone number:
	Date:	PI number:
	Folder:	File:
	<p>To begin with, I would like to complete my collection of demographic information. I have your contact details – though everything will be anonymised in the thesis. How far from the county town do you live?</p> <p>➤</p> <p>How far from a town do you live?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>Would you be prepared to say how old you are or to give an age range in which it falls?</p> <p>24 or younger; 25 – 34; 35 – 44; 45 – 54; 55 – 64; 65 or older?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>Can you tell me a bit about your working life before you became a child minder?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>Had you undertaken any specific training or qualifications for your previous employment/s?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>Were these compulsory entry qualifications or requirements or were they undertaken voluntarily?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>Can you tell me why you chose to become a childminder?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>How long have you been a child minder?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>Have you always worked as a child minder in this county?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>If respondent has been a childminder whilst living in another county since 2004. Can you tell me about this?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>Can you tell me a bit about your provision?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>You achieved an ‘outstanding’ judgement from Ofsted at your last inspection; congratulations. What do you think Ofsted saw or read or heard about you, your practice and your setting that enabled them to award an ‘outstanding’ judgement?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>Are there any aspects of your child minding provision that you feel were not acknowledged in the Ofsted process; points about you or your setting that you would have like to have seen in the final report?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>The Ofsted judgement means that you have developed a ‘quality’ setting. Can you explain what ‘quality’ practice and provision means to you?</p> <p>➤</p>	
	<p>Do you think there are any aspects of a quality setting and practitioner practice that are not included in an Ofsted inspection?</p>	

	<p>What do you think has enabled you to develop your high standard of provision? To explore this further, are there any ways in which any of the following have contributed to the development of your high standards within your setting? Prompts: Your previous work experience or training? ➤ Training since becoming a child minder? ➤ Support from the Local Authority or its Service Provider? ➤ Support from other practitioners? ➤ Anything else? ➤</p>
	<p>Are you able to put those factors in the order that you think have been the most influential? We talked about previous training and experience before becoming a childminder, training since becoming a childminder, support from the Local Authority or its Service Provider, other practitioners and anything else. ➤</p>
	<p>The last government put in a lot of money into Local Authorities in order to raise the qualification levels of early years practitioners. Do you think the information, encouragement to register for courses and ongoing support offered by your Local Authority or their Service Provider to raise qualification levels to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very good • good • satisfactory • poor • very poor? <p>Did you access this funding?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Yes / No ➤ <p>Do you think the support offered by the Local Authority or their Service Provider for other types of training, to be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very good • good • satisfactory • poor • very poor? <p>Do you think the <u>ongoing advice</u> offered by the Local Authority or their Service Provider to be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very good • good

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • satisfactory • poor • very poor? <p>You have to seek it it's out there Do you think the support offered by <u>other practitioners</u> to be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very good • good • satisfactory • poor • very poor
	Can you tell me about any further aspirations you might have for your setting? ➤
	Are there any ways in which you can envisage how you might achieve them? ➤
	Can you tell me about any further personal aspirations you might have? ➤
	How might you achieve them? ➤
	Do you think there are any frustrations working as a child minder? ➤
	What would you say are the rewards of being a child minder? ➤
	(How does working within this county compare to any other counties in which you have worked as a childminder?) ➤
	What would you consider to be the disadvantages of working within a rural Local Authority (as opposed to within a more compact area or urban Local Authority)? ➤
	What would you consider to be the advantages of working within a rural Local Authority (as opposed to within a more compact area or urban Local Authority)? ➤
	Can you suggest any ways in which you think childminders can be further supported to develop better practice? ➤
	Would you think this would be the same whether they practise in urban or rural Local Authorities? ➤
	Is there anything else about your practice and setting or the support that you receive that you think would be useful for me to know to help me in my examination of the factors that support quality childminding practice? ➤

Appendix 5.2: Reasons for becoming a childminder.

Reasons for becoming a childminder	Total
Could bring up own children and earn an income	17
To fit in with family	10
Started informally	10
Had worked previously with children	8
To stay at home with own children	7
Love children	4
Unhappy with available care	3
So I didn't need to find childcare	2
To work from home	2
New to area – heard/saw advertisement	2
Development of previous nanny role into own business	2
Like autonomy	1
Always involved in training and want to develop	1
Preferred childminding to previous job	1
Something I was interested in	1
Having own children made me realise how much I enjoyed children	1
Own child needed company and social interaction	1
Wanted flexibility	1
Wanted to be a teacher but received no encouragement	1
To raise an income to support daughter	1
Needed to change job	1
Not paid enough to cover child care for own child	1

Appendix 5.3: Factors that support quality practice - themes emerging.

Training/learning/knowledge	
EY training	46
Good knowledge of stages of development	11
Opportunity of distance learning	10
Lots of good LA training available	9
Enjoy / desire for learning/study	7
Good K & U of how to extend experiences and knowledge	6
Currently undertaking a degree	5
Funded specialist training – Montessori, ECAT, Forest Schools	5
Implement training	5
Impact of training since becoming accredited	4
Good initial childminder training	3
Conferences provide learning opportunities	2
Local childminders' self-funded and organised training	2
EYP	1
Have specialist CM level	1
	117
Linking with others	
Support from other childminders	35
Network meetings and support	23
Working with other early years practitioners	7
Close links with preschool and Foundation Stage in school	6
	71
Experiences prior to becoming a childminder	
Previous training	25
Previous work experience	32
Becoming a mother/parent	14
	71
Current circumstances	
Personal drive	18
Self-reflection	11
Own family	9
Organisational and presentational skills	8
Enjoyment of work	6
Ongoing experience	5
Feedback from families	5
Husband/partner involvement	4
SEF	1
Being a mentor	1
	68

LA support and services	
Child care/network co-ordinator	14
County funding	13
LA QA - childminder levels	8
Good LA support	8
LA receptive to CM needs	2
Children's Centre – good for learning, facilities	10
	57
Other factors	
Internet - Childminder forum/research	4
NCMA	2
Other professionals' faith and confidence in me	2
Being supported by a knowledgeable person who had been a very good childminder	2
	10

Appendix 5.4: Correlation of the Likert Scale, rating support received.

Factor	Times noted	Score	Times noted	Score	Times noted	Score	Times noted	Score	Times noted	Score	Total score
Other practitioners	7	35	13	52	9	27	5	10			124
Early years training	4	20	6	24	7	21	5	10	1	1	78
Early years experience	15	75									75
LA support			5	20	5	15	3	6	1	1	42
Previous experience	4	20	1	4			1	2	1	1	27
Previous work	3	15	2	8	1	3					26
Development worker			2	8	4	12	1	2			22
Network	2	10	3	12							22
Self motivation	2	10	3	12							22
Family	4	20							1	1	21
Previous training	2	10	1	4	1	3	1	2			19
Being a mother/parent	3	15			1	3					18
LA funding for training	2	10	2	8							18
Parents / family feedback	2	10			1	3			1	1	14

Foundation degree			1	4	2	6	1	2			12
LA training					3	9					9
Self confidence	1	5	1	4							9
Organisation skills	1	5									5
Quality assurance process	1	5									5
Internet forum			1	4							4
Montessori training			1	4							4
Professional colleague			1	4							4
Reading			1	4							4
Business skills					1	3					3
Flexibility					1	3					3
Montessori practitioners							1	2			2
NCMA							1	2			2

Appendix 6.1: Comparison of childminders' perception of quality with that of Ofsted judgements and research findings.

What do inspectors look for when judging provision? (Ofsted, 2008d, pp.13-14). <i>What inspectors consider.</i> How well the provision/providers:	<i>Elements of quality evidenced by inspection report data or research findings.</i>				
	Elements of quality used in Ofsted analysis – noted in over 75% of reports	Childminders' perception of quality	EPPE (2004) quality indicators	Fauth et al. (2011) quality indicators	Mathers et al. (2012) quality indicators
<i>Support children's learning; Plan the learning environment, and for children's play and exploration; Monitor provision and outcomes for children; and identify and make the necessary improvement.</i>	Knowledge and understanding of how children learn.	Providing developmentally appropriate experiences and activities; Multi-sensory approach.	Knowledge about how young children learn.		Schedule suited to individual needs.

<p><i>Safeguard all children, including making sure that adults looking after children or having unsupervised access to them are suitable to do so;</i> <i>Steps are taken by key people to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children;</i> <i>Adults teach children about keeping safe.</i></p>	<p>Knowledge and understanding of statutory requirements.</p>	<p>Keeping children secure; Keeping children safe.</p>	<p>Knowledge and understanding of the curriculum.</p>		
<p><i>Children's good health and well-being are promoted, the necessary steps are taken to prevent the spread of infection, and appropriate action is taken when children are ill;</i> <i>The outdoor and indoor spaces, furniture, equipment and toys are suitable and safe.</i></p>	<p>Knowledge and understanding of health and safety.</p>	<p>Children secure in second home and parents happy to leave them.</p>			<p>Health, safety and supervision.</p>

<i>Works in partnerships with others to ensure good quality early education and care.</i>	Links with other professionals.				
<i>Maintain records, policies and procedures required by the EYFS to ensure that the needs of all children are met.</i>	Appropriate policies and procedures in place.				
<i>Children are encouraged to develop the habits and behaviour appropriate to good learners, their own needs, and those of others.</i>	Safe, welcoming environment.	A positive environment in which children are happy; Children feel loved and cared for; Children well looked after; Cuddles, praise and encouragement; Children become part of the family; Lots of resources for children to access freely.			
<i>Helps children make the best possible progress in their learning and development, and promotes their welfare.</i>	Children progress, achieves potential.	Chn. supported to reach full potential; Developing independence.			

<i>Meets the needs of all children who attend; Supports every child so that no group or individual is disadvantaged.</i>	Individual needs and routines are met.	Providing the best for each individual child.		Tailoring provision to children's interests and needs.	Able to respond to the social, emotional and developmental needs of the children in their care.
	Knows individual interests.	Planning for particular needs and interests.			
<i>Use information from observation and assessment to ensure that all children achieve as much as they can; Plan for individual children; Identify and provide for additional learning and development needs.</i>	Observation and planning for next steps.	Observe to understand individual stage of development.			
	Child-led indoor/outdoor activities.				
	Promotes communication skills.	Way in which you communicate with children of great importance.			

	Promotes positive behaviour.	Helping children to build and maintain relationships.	The most effective settings adopted discipline / behaviour policies in which staff supported children in rationalising and talking through their conflicts.		
<i>Promote inclusive practice so that the learning and development, and welfare needs of all children are met.</i>	Promotes equality and inclusion.	Ensure inclusivity.			Inclusive practice.
	Trusting, sensitive relationships with children.	Build a really good relationship with children; Challenging but not undermining children's confidence.		Sustaining caring, consistent one-to-one relationships with children; To make learning part of a caring, close relationship.	Providing warm and nurturing relationships.
	Involves children in decisions.	Giving children a voice; Involving children in everything; Children have choices.			

	Models positive values.				
	Recognises family contribution.				Involving them as partners in their children's learning.
<i>Work with parents, carers, other providers, services and employers to promote children's care and early education; Involve parents and carers as partners, and other agencies and providers in children's learning and development.</i>	Trusting, effective relationships with parents/carers.	Build a really good relationship with parents; Committed to job and parents; Providing the service parents need; Support parenting skills; Offering flexibility to families.			Importance of engaging with parents.
	Opportunities to share information with parents/carers.	To understand parents' relationship with their child			
	Values training and CPD.	Continuing own professional development.			Training and qualifications.
<i>Plans for improvement and has effective processes of self-evaluation;</i>	Reflective and a commitment to improvement.	Continually evaluating practice;		Being willing to reflect and change practice.	Self-reflective managers leading quality

<i>Strive for improvement to provide high quality care and early education.</i>		Being totally involved in your work.			improvement.
		Way in which you communicate with children of great importance.	The quality of adult-child verbal interactions.		
		Always there to support.	Adult skills to support children.	Extending child-directed play.	
		Holistic – meeting all needs.		Maintaining flexibility to be responsive to children's interests and needs.	
		Learning through play.		Embedding learning in play.	
	Involves children in decisions.	Giving children a voice; Involving children in everything; Children have choices.			

Elements of quality not evidenced by inspection report data or childminder opinion.					
			The balance of who initiated the activities, staff or child, was about equal.		
			There were more intellectual gains for children in centres that encouraged high levels of parent engagement in their children's learning.		
				Using community resources.	

