

PACEY Cymru are keen to respond to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's consultation exploring how the outbreak of COVID-19 is affecting all aspects of life for children and young people (including students in further and higher education).

PACEY is the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years. PACEY Cymru supports members and people working in childcare in Wales to provide the best possible standards of care for children. We work with the Welsh Government, local authorities and agencies to ensure families across Wales have access to affordable, quality childcare. PACEY Cymru are also a partner in the Cwlwm consortium of childcare and play organisations supporting the sector in Wales.

PACEY Cymru have been working hard to support childminders directly in a variety of ways, including through our [Spotlight on Coronavirus](#) webpages which are available for all to access (with Wales specific pages), through regular news stories, social media posts, e-newsletters and letters from our Chief Executive to members as well as answering individual queries and support provided on a one to one basis.

Please see below key points on which we wish to draw your attention, including measures adopted to manage the pandemic for childminders, their own and childminded children and families across Wales.

The physical and mental health of children and young people, including Children's rights

What has gone well

PACEY Cymru have collated good news stories and examples of how childminders are continuing to keep in touch with children who are currently staying at home – this is through making videos of storytelling to share, regular video calls, telephone calls and messages, dropping off play resource packs for the children and sharing in activities such as a sunflower growing competition!

Challenges and queries

Including for both the children that a childminder is caring for and their own children.

- **Children's well-being** – including children's understanding the current situation, changes in routine, bereavement and trauma. PACEY have recognised this as an area of concern and are providing support through our website, with training and information including a specific section on [Supporting children - coronavirus](#)
- **Change of routine** – routines can be important for a child's sense of security and overall wellbeing, and these will have changed due to Covid 19 for those accessing a childcare setting as well as those who are not. If attending a childcare setting,

routines around activities, meals, pick ups, drop offs, accessing parent and toddler groups for example have all changed and can be unsettling for children.

- **Settling in** process is very different for new children attending a setting under the current restrictions, which can impact negatively on children's well-being. For example, the family can't visit with the child to meet the childminder and their family and go round the childminder's home to view it beforehand. Settling in sessions are either not possible at all or much reduced, increasing potential for anxiety for both children, families and childminders.
- **Transitions** – for many there are concerns when looking ahead to how children are going to be re-introduced back to childcare and education settings after being at home with their own family for an extended period. Consideration and planning will need to be provided for information sharing and settling back in to settings.
- **Social interactions** and the benefits from seeing friends has been reduced or stopped for children who would see other children in the childcare setting.
- **Physical activity and exercise.** Play is important for health, learning, development and well-being and opportunities for playing outdoors, with friends or with other childminded children. We have concerns on the impact on children who are not accessing play opportunities. We have had queries from childminders about how to manage daily exercise with childminding children, alongside their own family's needs and restrictions to the number of times they can leave the house.
- **Diets** and routines around food provision may have changed due to parents being asked to bring in all food from home – childminders have reported that children have found it difficult to understand why they can't eat the food from the childminders, or the same as the childminder and their children are having.
- **Childminder's own children concerns** - some have expressed real worries about children from key worker families bringing the virus into their home, and the potential impact if members of their family contract the illness.
- **Parental choice and consistency of care – allocation of childcare places by Local Authorities for pre-school children.** Although most Local Authorities appear to be offering parental choice and consistency of care for families, we are aware of examples where Local Authorities are allocating places. For example Bridgend are only providing childcare under the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS) for children aged 3 – 5 years in 6 key hubs. Parents cannot chose a childminder or other childcare setting for this age range. Concerns around child's emotional well-being and no continuity of care for them if they are already settled in a setting is that is still operating, and the child is being asked to move to a hub that they are not familiar with. In addition, parents have concerns that children are mixing in larger groups than necessary.

Vulnerable and disadvantaged children (including pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, children in need, looked after children and children eligible for free school meals).

What has gone well

- **Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS).**

Fully funded childcare for vulnerable children has been ensured by the Welsh Government through re-purposing the Childcare Offer. Local Authorities are delivering this through childcare hubs or childcare settings,

PACEY Cymru have an example of a childminder providing care for Social Services for a pre-school child has highlighted how the childminder has been able to adapt her service and settling in process due to the fact the family have not been able to visit the setting and can only meet the childminder at distance. The childminder has picked up and dropped off the child to their home, and used videos/video calling to show the family around her home and to provide feedback through regular updates during the day as well as to ensure she is meeting the child's individual needs.

Challenges and queries

- **Home environment** – however for some children, and not just those defined as vulnerable or disadvantaged by the Welsh Government find accessing hubs or childcare a challenge or even traumatic, and many parents will have sought ways to keep their children at home to minimise their anxiety and to keep to the familiar routine and comfort of home. Consideration needs to be given to those many children who have thrived in their home environment and the potential impact of a transition back into school or childcare.
- **Parents and children both need to be involved**, have a voice, have their individual needs met and not feel rushed in the process to settle children back in to education and care settings.

Early childhood education and care, including impact on the childcare market and childhood development.

What has gone well

- **Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS)**. PACEY Cymru have found that in the majority of Local Authorities registered childminders are able to deliver childcare for pre-school age children of critical workers and vulnerable children funded under this scheme.
- **CIW has issued adapted registration guidance**. It is extremely positive when that new registrations can continue in order to support sufficiency of childcare places in Wales. The [CIW adapted registration guidance](#), will support and encourage those that are on their journey to registering as a childminder to continue with their plans.
- **Recognition of the early years, childcare and play sector**. It is hoped that the [video](#) produced by [WeCare Wales](#) to say [thank you to childcare workers in Wales](#) will show the appreciation and need for people to work in early years, childcare and playwork. It has also been positive for the sector to receive recognition from Welsh Government of their valuable role in a [letter from Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, Julie Morgan AM](#).

Financial Challenges and queries

PACEY Cymru recognise that the outbreak of COVID-19 is affecting the financial sustainability of a wide range of sectors across Wales, however we are keen to draw attention to the financial impact for the registered childminders. As a Cwlwm partner we know that concerns for the sector have been shared with Welsh Government and

Ministers. As an England and Wales organisation we have also ensured that concerns are shared with UK Government.

- **PACEY Survey reveals financial challenges for childminders.** The findings of a recent survey completed by 5,000 childminders in England and Wales identified that many [childminders will miss out on Government support](#). The survey revealed that almost half (40%) of childminders say they are not confident, and that the vast majority (69%) of childminders in Wales made under £10,000 profit over the last three years. The survey also found that newer childminders (18% of survey respondents) will receive nothing or lower amounts under the current Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). We are urgently calling on Government to **provide a grant for those not eligible for support or receiving very low levels of Government support**, such as the newly registered and those on very low incomes, to help them to stay afloat and prevent the closure of childminder settings.
- **PACEY Cymru case studies illustrate the personal financial impact.** PACEY Cymru have shared a series of case studies with Welsh Government to illustrate the extremely personal impact of COVID-19 and associated financial concerns on childminders in Wales. Please see **appendix 1** for further information.
- **Financial challenges for the childcare market.** PACEY Cymru is a key partner of the Cwlwm consortium. We have jointly written to the First Minister in March to highlight the complexity of the sector and press for financial support and protection at this challenging time. Read the [full letter from Cwlwm](#) and [response from Ken Skates, Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales](#). Further to this Cwlwm have written to the Minister in April to raise continuing points in relation to financial support available and gaps that have arisen. Read the full letters [here](#) and [here](#).
- **Childcare Offer and other funding for childcare places.** The withdrawal of the childcare offer funding for children starting in the summer term has had a negative impact on childminders, as this income had been planned for and expected following the [announcement on Childcare Offer for Wales payments](#) that was made in March. Confirmation on when funded childcare will be available again (ie. Childcare Offer and Flying Start) should be provided at the same time as any guidance and information on plans towards 'reopening'.

Challenges and queries – Guidance and support preparing for reopening

PACEY Cymru recognise that there is work underway to prepare guidance and support for the sector in preparation of any 'reopening' to support settings with preparing for this. PACEY Cymru have noted some considerations in relation to the development of such guidance:

- **Guidance to support re-opening of childcare settings**, including for example The Social Distancing and Infection Control guidance which needs to be published well in advance of settings 'reopening' to support preparation. Linked to this is the importance of highlighting how completing appropriate risk assessments will be key, and will need to be individual to the setting – guidance for home-based childminders and nannies will be needed.
- **Guidance for home-based settings.** Consideration should be given to how any guidance under development translates in a home-based setting given for example:

- a) family members will also be present
- b) most childminders do not have a distinct shut off childcare space in their house
- c) they cannot spilt children into smaller groups by age if working alone
- d) social distancing may be more difficult in a childminding setting given space and supervision.
- **School pick ups/drop offs.** Confirmation and guidance will be needed on whether school pickups will be permitted and so wrap-around services for 3 /4 year olds can resume. Also consideration for childminders who could well be bringing other childminded or their own children with them to/from schools. This could be difficult if a school adopts different pick up and drop off times for different age groups.
- **Learning from England.** There are lessons that can be learnt from the England approach, given the move to 'reopen' has happened there sooner than here. Childcare organisations that work across England and Wales, for example PACEY and NDNA would be able to share some valuable insights.
- **CIW Guidance** Clear guidance will be needed on CIW's expectations during this period, and how services may differ in some areas of the NMS particularly to pre-COVID 19. A timeframe for how long the relaxation of some of the NMS will be in place for should be shared in advance of settings 'reopening'.
- **Testing** In preparation for reopening, and an increase in the number of children accessing childcare, testing for key workers and family members needs to be in place and be available locally to enable quicker return to work for providers and/or staff members and reassurance from parents in case of issues arising to prevent settings needing to close again unnecessarily.
- **Cross boundary issues** - In addition to the above, PACEY Cymru would like to highlight a current issue where clear guidance would be beneficial. This is how cross boundary issues work where their position in England and Wales is different. We are working to ensure that the message on the position in Wales is clear to childminders in Wales. However, we are aware of a number of queries, particularly from border counties, for example where parents are living and accessing childcare in Wales but working in England.

Support available for the workforce, including (but not limited to) health, social care, education, children's services, and youth workers.

What has gone well

As mentioned in the introduction, PACEY Cymru have been working hard to support childminders directly in a variety of ways, including through our [Spotlight on Coronavirus](#) webpages which are available for all to access, through regular news stories, social media posts, e-newsletters and letters from our Chief Executive to members as well as answering individual queries and support provided on a one to one basis.

- **FAQs and News updates** PACEY Cymru have been able to update the information on our website as soon as it is available, and share with childminders across Wales through our social media. We have had feedback to acknowledge how much this quick response and detailed information has been appreciated by childminders.
- **Individual queries** from childminders have been followed and forwarded to Welsh Government via the TalkChildcare email and responses sought.

- **Case studies** from childminders highlighting their challenges and support they need have been collated by PACEY Cymru and forwarded to Welsh Government.
- **Local Authorities** - In addition we have been regular contact with Local Authorities Childcare and Family Information Service Teams, answering queries, offering support where possible and updating to ensure they have the correct information.
- **Cwlwm partnership** – as part of Cwlwm, PACEY Cymru have played a key role in highlighting the needs of childminders to Welsh Government through letters to the First Minister, and providing regular updates, information, feedback, support and queries to through meetings, telephone calls and emails with the Welsh Government’s Childcare, Play and Early years division.

Challenges and queries

- **Financial support** - For childminders as self-employed sole traders accessing financial support has been the priority and focus of much of the support that they have needed. It has been a challenge to raise the voice of childminders unique situation in providing childcare from their own home, as well as being self-employed and reliant on their income from this.
- **Information** It has been shown to be important that Welsh Government consider the timing of information being released in order that support can be made quickly available by all organisations and agencies and prevent anxiety and confusion over a weekend when support is not easily available.
- **Mixed messages** and keeping information accurate – overcoming social media rumours, and ensuring those working in isolation are able to get the correct and up to date information
- **Press and other public misinformation** – for example when it was reported there was a lack of childcare places and also more recently the CMA investigation into childcare contracts and Martin Lewis’s statement about this which have since been challenged, but cause confusion and anxiety for many with potential financial impact on small settings such as childminders who are struggling on no or low income.
- **DEWIS**, the website that hosts and shares childcare settings details for families in Wales to choose from, took a blanket approach to say all settings were closed and each setting has to then proactively contact them to say that they were open. Again potentially impacting financially on childcare settings from possible income when key worker families are looking to check availability in their area.
- **Social distancing guidance** for childcare – the Welsh Government guidance that is available is based on larger settings. Childminders and nannies would not be able to realistically follow this in a homebased environment where they need to consider their own children and other household members who live in the home.
- **Providing childcare from home** - for childminders they need to balance the need for financial income and providing childcare against the health and well-being of themselves and their own family (including children and young people). We are aware of childminders having to close to shield their own child (or family member) with a health condition.

Parents and carers

What is going well

- Information for parents for example on who are key workers, [5 things you need to know](#) has supported childminders with those messages for families on whether or not they can care for their child under the current restrictions.

Challenges and queries

In addition to the points raised in previous sections about parental choice, challenges for settling children in to a new setting and misinformation, please see below:

- **Fees / contracts** – we understand that parents have queries about where to seek advice on fees and their contracts with childcare settings. As highlighted in the previous section unfortunately information being provided in the media can be misleading and inaccurate, which adds to this challenge for childcare settings and parents alike.
- **Returning to work** – with many childcare settings temporarily or permanently closed, and with no or little financial income over previous months, parents could be worried that their current childcarer won't be there when they need return to work. Time to find new childcare and resettle children needs to be considered for both families and children.
- **Nannies** there has been a lack of clear guidance for parents as employers of nannies, which PACEY Cymru has highlighted to Welsh Government.

Appendix 1

Childminder Case Studies on the impact of COVID-19

April 2020

PACEY Cymru have been supporting the sector and childminding settings in Wales specifically in relation to COVID 19. As a Cwlwm partner we know that concerns for the sector have been shared with Welsh Government and Ministers. As an England and Wales organisation we have also ensured that concerns are shared with UK Government. The personal impact of this though is currently missing and so we have produced a collation of short case studies to show examples of the extremely personal impact of COVID-19 and associated financial concerns on childminders in Wales.

Case study 1

████████████████████, registered childminders, Swansea

I childmind alongside my husband which means childminding is the only source of income for our family. I have been childminding for 15 years and my husband has been

childminding for 11 years. We have 2 children of our own to support and have 11 children on our childminding books at present.

We do care for children whose parents are key workers however those families are currently keeping their children at home. Some families have agreed to pay us half fees as we have explained to them that we need to continue to pay business expenses in order to keep our setting open once everything returns to normal but we are not sure how long they can continue doing this. If we did not have this income both myself and my husband will need to find other jobs.

We are really struggling at the moment as the income we have is barely covering our business expenses such as insurances for home and car, ICO membership, ongoing costs of 2 vehicles etc. We have had to borrow money to buy food even though we have taken advantage of a 3 month mortgage break and cancelled payments for our utilities and council tax this is not enough. We know that the SEISS fund will be available in June but we do not know how much will be provided or even if it will be enough which is a great source of stress and worry. We are unable to claim for Universal Credit as we are still on the old tax credit scheme receiving a minimal amount.

We are both fully committed and passionate about childminding having put lots of our own income into the business in recent years to improve our setting and now we feel left and forgotten. We really need some cash support and a lifeline right now before our business shuts for good.

Case study 2

██████████, Registered Childminder, Flintshire

If someone had said to me two months ago I would be in this position now I would not have believed them. I love my job. I thought it was my forever job and now I really don't know.

I have put things in place financially such as a mortgage holiday and delayed payments of utilities but I am worried because I know that all these payments will still need to be covered eventually. We are also supporting our daughter at university with her rent payments – these need to be payed now or she will not be able to continue. How will we manage in the months to come?

I know the government have said they will support us through the SEISS scheme but it is the uncertainty that is killing me. What if we get to June and they change things again? What if they say there is no funding or that it is greatly reduced? I have childcare offer payments coming in that are keeping us afloat until June but I have

worked out that the payments we are expected to get in June will be one third of my current wages. This is not enough.

I do not feel comfortable asking for retainer payments from parents. If they are paying for a retainer then I need to guarantee them a space in the future. I just don't feel I can provide that guarantee at the moment.

My other worry is that the government will want me to pay back the £5000 grant I received to improve my outdoor play provision. When I signed for the grant I promised to be childminding for 5 years but what if that is not possible?

This morning I have spent an hour crying whilst sending messages to the children I care for who don't understand why they can't come and play. I am heart broken and for the first time in this job I feel really vulnerable. I have worked so hard building up my business, my reputation and my knowledge of childcare and I feel it has all been for nothing now. Unless anything changes by June I will be looking for other work.

Case study 3

██████████, Registered Childminder, Monmouthshire

I started childminding in January 2018 so have only been working for two full tax years.

People don't realise how much it costs to start a childminding business – after paying for training, buying resources, and making my home suitable for taking in children, I made approximately £700 profit in my first year and then £6,800 in second year.

I was building up my business really well and, with 8 children in my setting, I was due to receive £1,500 a month - that's the income that I'd budgeted for as a minimum this year.

Under the current announcement for the SEISS I will be entitled to 80% of my profit calculated from my profit over the last three years so the figure I will receive is extremely low and will impact on me financially.

My partner is a key worker - he is postal worker - and because of his wage I am not able to get universal credit. I have a son from a previous relationship and I don't receive any maintenance for him, so my partner's wage pays for everything.

We are due to get married in October and we've paid for half of it, but we're not sure how we'll manage it now – we were counting on my wage coming in.

I'm really worried about what our financial situation. One parent who'd just started to use me wants a full refund but I don't know how I'll do that. I understand the parent's position however am afraid of how this will impact on my reputation or financial insecurity whichever way I decide to go in relation to this.

My situation has been made even worse by the changes that have just been announced for funded children under the Childcare Offer for Wales payments. I have one funded child and while I have been informed that this payment will be honoured until the end of June another child who was due to start after Easter will not now be funded. I am concerned around how changes to the funding and agreement may impact on me and my financial situation further.

We really are in a dire financial situation. Before becoming a childminder I was a maths and IT teacher at a comprehensive for many years and also worked in an office for a construction firm. Either of those jobs would have provided more support for me during this pandemic – I feel I have nothing to rely on.

Monmouthshire council have apparently grants for small businesses and I have enquired – it's difficult to find information and to understand this and I did apply but was told I was not eligible due to working on domestic premises.

I really want to reopen – I am passionate about childcare and want to build a thriving business but don't know what we'll do. To continue to pay the mortgage we need to be bringing in an extra £600 a month and now I have nothing.

I am a proud PACEY member and have enjoyed working with the PACEY Cymru team. I was taking my children into a care home on a weekly basis and could really see the benefit of children interacting with the older people. Working with the PACEY Cymru team we developed a pact for childminders to streamline risk assessment etc to help other childminders who wanted to join up with care homes. This is just the sort of initiative that I would like to continue in the future.

I am really going to struggle to keep myself and my family going over the coming months. We are really worried that we might lose our home if we cannot find a way through and need urgent financial assistance.

Case study 4

[REDACTED], Registered Childminder, Vale of Glamorgan

I feel lucky at the moment as up until now parents have paid their contracts, however I know that these could be cancelled at any time, especially as the lockdown lengthens. A few of us childminders have formed a support group in the Vale of Glamorgan and know that others have lost all their income from their childminding contracts and are looking at closing their business. For example a childminder who was on maternity leave last year does not have accounts to submit for the SEISS scheme, and with young children at home to care for and is finding it difficult to find alternative income.

In order to consider the welfare of all, I have encouraged children of key worker families to stay at home. When this first came in, I offered to take school age children who would normally be in school free of charge so that the family could all be together, minimising risk of the spread of infection.

Although I am not open for new families at the moment to limit the risk of infection, I may need to reconsider this if current contracts are cancelled.

For me, I have business expenses that I need to cover – I bought a van with a loan in order to be able to transport the children as my car was too small. I will still need this van in the future to provide childcare, but in the short term need to cover all the associated costs and expenses. I am concerned that the 80% of profit offered by the SEISS scheme will not cover this.

With the cancellation of Childcare Offer payments for new children due to start in the summer term and parents refusing to pay retainers, I am very worried that childminders won't survive this and when restrictions are lifted they won't be in place to support families back to work as they have had to take on other work. Childminders need the support now to survive and be available for the future.

Case study 5

██████████, Registered Childminder, Powys

I have been working in childcare and early years for 30 years and as a registered childminder for the last 12 years. My husband is my assistant, this is our only income. I'm not charging anything for those not using my service, only asking for voluntary retainer from those who can afford it, and wish to take up their places when restrictions are lifted. I am continuing to give much needed support to my mindees and their parents at home, including doorstep deliveries of craft materials, activities, and video calling to stay connected. I have furloughed my husband because of the reduced number of children that are able to use our service.

I have applied to the furlough scheme for my husband, and am waiting to hear whether this financial support will come through. We are concerned that we might be asked whether my husband should be working so we could care for more children of critical workers, but this would not help to limit the number of children in each setting as advised by the Government. I hope that the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS) will help, but I won't know for sure until we can apply for this, and even then payments won't be until June. It seems that staying open for critical workers is making it much more complicated for us to identify how much support we can apply for. We are worried this will put us at risk of having less financial security than if we had just closed our doors and simply applied to these funding schemes.

I have remained open for key workers children, it is my desire to support our parents and children, and to stay open for critical workers for as long as I am able. I have written off money owed to us from March and April from parents who have told us they are struggling financially. I wholeheartedly applaud the offer of the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS), I think it is important that Critical Workers who are continuing to work in risky situations for the benefit of wider society are supported and rewarded. I am more than happy to facilitate this in my setting, however it is important that the funding for this is fair and does not penalise childminders.

I want to be very clear - I in no way wish to make money out of this crisis and I certainly don't expect anything extra. I simply want to ensure that myself and fellow childminders are being treated fairly, paid what it actually costs to provide the service, and that our compassion and commitment to support key workers is not being taken advantage of.

It's very simple and I believe fair to ask that I be paid my hourly rate for each child regardless of their age, for the hours and days they're actually here, including an uplift when working bank holidays. It is also fair to ask that by remaining open I will receive the same support as others that have had to close already, including the Childcare Offer funding. It is fair to ask for reassurance that if my service has to close due to one of us becoming unwell that we will be supported,

I do appreciate all that PACEY are doing at this time to promote the fair and just treatment of our sector.