



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

10 Year Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan: Review and Refresh



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Ministerial Foreword

As Minister for Mental Health and the Early Years with responsibility for the childcare and playwork workforce, I am pleased to publish this review and refresh of Welsh Government's [10 Year Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan](#).

Published in 2017, the Workforce Plan set out our vision for children from all backgrounds to have the best start in life, to ensure all children can reach their full potential and lead a healthy, prosperous, and fulfilling life.

Ensuring we have a highly skilled, qualified and supported workforce is central to achieving this. Actions contained within the plan were developed in recognition of the many challenges the sector was facing in 2017 and to support roll out of the Childcare Offer for Wales. In December 2018, [a written statement](#) set out progress of the plan one year after publication demonstrating that early progress had already been made in advancing actions in areas such as business support, capacity building and recruitment.

I'm pleased to report we have made further progress in delivering many of the actions outlined in 2017. This review and refresh of the plan provides an opportunity to reflect on our progress to date and provides a springboard for our next steps.

Our refresh provides me with the opportunity to make clear my commitment to ensuring all children in Wales have the best start in life and the opportunity to achieve their potential. The childcare and playwork workforce is central to this and is our most precious and important asset.

For the remainder of this plan's life, we will work tirelessly to attract the right people into the sector, to support them to develop so that they may provide high quality play, learning and care. We are determined for the workforce to thrive, feel valued and want to stay and progress in this hugely valuable and rewarding sector.

By continuing to listen, respond and work collaboratively with key stakeholders we will ensure that the actions we take over the remainder of the plan's life recognise the vital contribution the workforce makes to children and families across Wales.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jayne Bryant".

Jayne Bryant MS
Minister for Mental Health
and Early Years

Executive Summary

We published our 10 Year Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan in 2017. This review and refresh provides an update on our progress against the actions originally outlined in the Plan and where we will go next.

The rest of the document outlines the detail of our progress and future aims; a summary of each theme is provided below.

Attracting High Quality New Recruits

We need to make sure childcare and playwork are areas in which people from all backgrounds want to work. We need it to be clear that working in childcare and playwork is rewarding, with opportunities for progression.

Since 2017 we have:

- Funded Social Care Wales to develop the [WeCare Wales](#) attraction and recruitment framework. It has included dedicated promotion campaigns showcasing the sector and encouraging entry, developed a network of Ambassadors highlighting careers on offer, and maintained a strong social media presence.
- Worked with employability colleagues to promote entry into childcare via Working Wales, Skills Gateway and ReAct+.
- Established a dedicated Anti-Racist Wales Childcare & Play Governance Group to take the actions of the [Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan](#) forward.

We will now:

- Establish a Fair Work Forum made up of key partners from across the childcare and playwork sector to strengthen workers voice and consider the key issues facing the sector.
- Continue to work with key partners to increase the number of Welsh speaking recruits to the sector via support for Welsh medium qualifications and practitioner Welsh language support.
- Develop further our approach to supporting and developing a diverse workforce, working with Cwlwm partners, SCW and the Anti-Racist Wales Childcare & Play Governance Group.

Raising standards and skills

We want to ensure that those working in the childcare and playwork sector are highly skilled and knowledgeable about how to best support and nurture children. We also want to ensure that the standards the sector holds itself to are high and fit for purpose.

Since 2017 we have:

- Reviewed and updated the National Minimum Standards to ensure the standards and requirements of staff and settings are fit for purpose.
- Introduced a new suite of bilingual [childcare qualifications](#) from Level 2 to 5, designed to provide a recognised and consistent high-quality standard, as well as clearer pathways for those wanting to progress in their careers.

- Worked closely with Play Wales and PETC Wales to develop key playwork qualifications (Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP), the Playwork Practice Principles (P3), plus the Level 3 Award in transition to playwork).

We will now:

- Consider the outcome of the consultation on professional registration of the childcare and playwork workforce seeking the sector's views on a workforce register.
- Continue to support leadership within the sector via dedicated network support as well as the provision of qualifications (including funding for Welsh medium qualifications).
- Continue to work with SCW to deliver learning informed by sector needs.

Investing in building capacity and capability in the sector

We want to ensure that there is a strong childcare and playwork sector able to meet the needs and choices of families. We want to support settings to grow their capacities and capabilities further.

Since 2017 we have:

- Provided all registered full day care premises with 100% business rate relief exemption. This exemption, originally for three years (2019-2022), has been extended for a further three years up to March 2025 following a [review](#).

- Worked with Business Wales to provide (between 2019 and 2022) two business support grants aimed at supporting new childminder start-ups and enabling existing childcare providers to expand their business through taking on new staff.
- Aligned hourly funding rates for Foundation Learning Nursery and Childcare Offer to ensure consistency and equity across the sector.

We will now:

- Continue to support the expansion of Welsh medium childcare and early years provision via dedicated support from Development Officers and funding to increase the number of Welsh medium after school clubs and childminders.
- Continue the expansion of Flying Start childcare for 2 year olds.
- Review the Childcare Offer rate in line with the agreed review cycle, and review 100% business rates relief an extension to the 100% business rates relief.



Background

The [10 Year Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan](#), published in December 2017, set out the Welsh Government's ambition to develop a skilled childcare and play workforce highly regarded as a career of choice, recognised for the vital role they play in supporting children's development. The plan also recognises the key economic role the sector plays in supporting employment and education and training for parents and carers, acknowledging the sector as a key part of the foundational economy.

The Workforce Plan set out key actions Welsh Government would take to build the childcare and playwork workforce and the sector more generally during the fifth Assembly term (2016-2021). The actions were developed with the overarching aim of ensuring all children in Wales have the best start in life and an opportunity to fulfil their potential. Strengthening and growing the workforce that support our children is key to this fundamental aim.

The actions detailed in the plan are set out under three themes:

- Attracting high quality recruits.
- Raising standards and skills.
- Investing in building capacity and capability.

The plan also outlined Welsh Government's longer-term vision focused on enhancing quality and realising the potential of the workforce.

Working in partnership

We have worked across Government and with a range of key stakeholders to progress the actions contained within the plan. These include:

- Social Care Wales (SCW), who lead on the improvement of social care and childcare in Wales and are our key strategic partner in supporting implementation of the Workforce Plan.
- Local Authority play and childcare teams, as well as the Welsh Local Government Association.
- Cwlwm partners, the five leading childcare organisations in Wales representing different setting types across the sector.
- Play Wales, the national charity for children's play in Wales.
- PETC Wales, a forum for the playwork sector that examines issues of strategic importance to all aspects of playwork education, training and qualifications in Wales.

10 Year Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan Review: Aim and approach

The aim of this review is to consider progress to date against the plan's key actions. The scope of the review is to:

- Assess progress against the original commitments set out in the Workforce Plan.
- Highlight what other activity has taken place to support the workforce during this time.
- Determine if the three key themes remain relevant and what activity is still required.





Our approach has been shaped and informed by the wellbeing goals of the [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#) and the five ways of working. We have worked to assess progress against the original commitments and fostered a collaborative approach with key stakeholders in determining the relevance of the plan's key themes in seeking to support all those in the childcare and playwork sector so that we can bring benefits to children and families in the long term.

This review of the 10 Year Plan has afforded us an opportunity to take stock on progress to date and to focus on how the Welsh Government can continue to support the childcare and playwork workforce. Key issues of sustainability, recruitment and retention are at the heart of this review.





Key Actions

In 2017 we set out key actions to be achieved over the lifetime of the Plan. These actions are set out below. The pages that follow assess the progress Welsh Government has made to date against these actions and outlines other achievements under each theme.

Attracting High Quality New Recruits		Raising Standards and Skills		Investing in Capacity and Capability		
Develop a Career Advice framework to ensure up to date and accurate careers advice in partnership with SCW.	Encourage a Career in Childcare . Pilot with National Day Nurseries Association "Childcare Works" projects to provide short term work experience within the sector.	Review the National Minimum Standards to ensure they are fit for purpose and respond to changing needs of the sector.	Embed occupational competency into Early Years and Childhood Degrees routes . Support graduates to start their own childcare businesses.	Work with Business Wales to provide business support services to childcare businesses e.g. improve financial planning.	Work with Regional Skills Partnerships to support the development of the sector at local and regional levels.	Explore ways to mitigate the impact of Business Rates , taking into account the unique challenges faced by the sector.
Enable Skills Gateway to provide information to the sector as a single access point for employability support.		Offer a structured training and development route based on a new suite of qualifications for the sector.	Support transferability with optional training modules for: Early Years Health Support Workers, Supporting children with ALN, Speech and Language Development and Foundation phase.	Work with Development Bank of Wales to support childcare businesses to access finance to grow and expand.		Further develop our Progress for Success programme, exploring the best use of European funding to support practitioners to develop their skills.
Maximise support available to those wishing to enter and remain in work through our Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE) programme.	Work with SCW to encourage greater diversity across the workforce.	Develop a career pathway for child minders and home carers , based around a revised pre registration (CYPOP5) award.	Work with PETC Wales to support the development of the Playwork Workforce to ensure practitioners can progress within the play sector.		Provide access to flexible and affordable training and development which is through the new apprenticeship policy . Continue to support level 2, to enable practitioners to achieve level 3.	

Progress at a glance

Did Welsh Government achieve the actions set out in the original plan?

Attracting High Quality New Recruits		Raising Standards and Skills		Investing in Capacity and Capability		
<p>WeCare Wales attraction and recruitment framework launched.</p>	<p>Childcare Works pilot undertaken. In total, 178 individuals were recruited to the pilot (52% of participants entered employment, 33% in the childcare sector).</p>	<p>NMS review completed in 2019 and progressed following the pandemic. Refreshed NMS published May 2023.</p>	<p>Social Care Wales worked with Higher Education Institutes across Wales to embed practical competency into degree qualifications.</p>	<p>Business Wales support grants provided to childminders and full day care settings between 2019 and 2021.</p>	<p>Regional FE provision determined through engagement with businesses and key partners such as Social Care Wales and Cwllwm.</p>	<p>All registered full day care premises were given 100% business rate relief exemption for a period of three years (2019 – 2022). Following a review, this was extended to 31 March 2025.</p>
<p>Work undertaken with Business Wales to support business skills of the sector, including use of Skills Gateway and advisor 1 to 1 support.</p>		<p>New suite of bilingual childcare qualifications (Level 2 to Level 5) launched between 2019 and 2020.</p>	<p>The Level 4 professional practice qualification offers optional modules including recognising additional needs and supporting parenting.</p>	<p>Dedicated childcare and play business advice includes using Development Bank of Wales.</p>		<p>ESF funded Progress for Success (PFS) Programme supported the sector between 2016 – 2023, providing funded access to qualifications for childcare and play practitioners.</p>
<p>PaCE covered the cost of paid childcare for 715 parents enabling them to complete training, volunteering experience or move into employment between March 2019 – March 2023.</p>	<p>Focus on increasing diversity via expert sessions, funding to Cwllwm and establishment of Anti-Racist Wales Childcare & Play Governance Group.</p>	<p>Pre-registration units were developed in partnership between SCW and PACEY Cymru setting out opportunities to progress within the wider sector</p>	<p>Key play work qualifications developed and funded in partnership with Play Wales.</p>		<p>Apprenticeship programme supports apprenticeship levels 2-5 in the childcare sector, including apprenticeships for those working 10-16 hours a week.</p>	

Attracting high quality new recruits

Children are at the heart of the childcare and playwork sector

Why is attracting high quality new recruits important for children?

I need to be cared for at all times and have enough people around me to make sure that I come to no harm and can thrive in all environments. Being cared for outside of my home is important to my development and to do this there needs to be enough qualified people working in settings to take care of me. I thrive when those looking after me are from different backgrounds and cultures as this helps my understanding of the world develop.



Under this theme we said we would:

- Develop career advice.
- Pilot the Childcare Works project.
- Support Skills Gateway.
- Offer support to parents and carers via PaCE.
- Work with SCW to increase diversity across the sector.

What did we do?

Career Advice

The [WeCare Wales](#) attraction and recruitment framework was developed by Social Care Wales to raise the profile of the sector and attract people to a career in childcare and playwork. It has included dedicated campaigns showcasing the sector and encouraging entry, developed a network of Ambassadors highlighting careers on offer, and maintained a strong social media presence. Their campaign [The children of Wales are looking for childcare and play workers](#) which ran from February to April 2023 reached over 2.5 million people and resulted in 60,000 further interactions (with signposted websites etc).

Childcare Works

Welsh Government provided funding for the National Day Nurseries Association's Childcare Works pilot. The pilot project focused on attracting high quality individuals with the right skills and behaviours to work with our young children. The project supported participants to gain the necessary skills to become future qualified practitioners. The project provided supported employment in childcare for unemployed and economically inactive individuals. In total, 178 individuals were recruited to the project, 52% of participants entered employment, 33% in the childcare sector.

An [evaluation](#) of the project was published in July 2021. Welsh Government funding for the project ended December 2021. The project is continuing across several local authority areas in Wales.

Skills Gateway

[Skills Gateway](#) is an online engagement and signposting resource hosted by Business Wales. It outlines the support available for skills development and recruitment e.g. apprenticeships. Our work with Business Wales has meant that advisors now have a better understanding of the make-up and needs of the childcare and playwork sector and how they can best be supported.

Parents, Childcare and Employment

[PaCE](#) launched in July 2015, funded via the Welsh Government and the European Social Fund. PaCE funds childcare for parents to enable them to complete training and activities to move them closer to the labour market. Between March 2019 and March 2023, PaCE covered the cost of paid childcare for 715 parents enabling them to either complete training, volunteering experience or move into employment. This included 45 disabled parents and 37 parents from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background.



Encourage greater diversity

The Workforce Plan sets out our ambition to build a diverse and inclusive workforce. This has seen the development of diverse range of case studies ([WeCare Wales](#)) seeking to encourage underrepresented groups to the sector including men, Welsh speakers and those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

We worked with Business Wales to develop [childcare expert sessions](#) which includes a thought piece on the importance of diversity and expert speakers on recruitment and retention in the childcare sector including the value of recruiting more men to the workforce.

We published our [Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan](#) in June 2022 and established our Anti-Racist Wales Childcare & Play Governance Group to support us in delivering our key actions. We have provided funding to Cwlwm to support achieving our vision of an anti-racist Wales. This includes the development of professional learning resources to support childcare practitioners and a focus on promoting Welsh-medium childcare in ethnic minority communities. Funding for Cwlwm has also supported the development of inclusive recruitment processes and provision of training promoting inclusion and equality. The SCW Introduction to Childcare course has been provided to a range of communities and cohorts across Wales, including to an African Community Group in West Wales where 23 people completed the course. Links were made with Working Wales in Swansea to provide course completers with employability support.

In addition to the actions we took against the plan's original objectives, we have also...



Developed a dedicated [childcare playwork and early years Working Wales webpage](#) which along with a social media campaign in January 2023 showcased careers and progression across childcare and playwork. Data shows that for the two-week period following the campaign there was an increase in new visitors to the childcare and playwork webpage (91 for a two-week period 9-23 January compared to 18 for a two-week period the previous month 5-19 Dec). In addition, more people went on to find out more about working in the sector.



Commissioned a childcare and playwork workforce mapping project to help us better understand the sectors' make up and establish opportunities to address recruitment issues.



Supported settings with overhead costs, via 100% business rates relief and increases to Childcare Offer hourly rate to support settings in offering reasonable rates of pay to their staff.



Provided funding to Social Care Wales for two pilot projects: an introductory course to support recruitment into the sector offering initial training with support to those undertaking the programme; and a pilot transition pathway to map qualifications from other sectors to enable an individual to be employed in the childcare sector.



Provided funding to Play Wales who commissioned the Welsh Play Workforce Study 2021 which provides an insight into the play workforce in Wales, focusing on three overlapping areas: Strategy; links between strategy and practice; and the play workforce itself.



Provided funding to the Cwlwm consortium to work with the Further Education Colleges and Universities to attract more young people into the Welsh medium childcare workforce and developing marketing and communication assets to promote the benefits of careers in the childcare and playwork sector to improve recruitment and retention.

Raising standards and skills

Children are at the heart of the childcare and playwork sector

Why is attracting high quality new recruits important for children?

I need to be safe and secure and cared for. I need the people that look after me to understand what I need as I grow and what experiences and environments I can best thrive in. This helps me develop social and communication and a whole range of other skills, that I'll depend on in later life. Being a nurturing and enabling adult takes specialist skills and knowledge and I need those that care for me to have this knowledge to ensure I have the best start in life.



Under this theme we said we would:

- Review the National Minimum Standards.
- Introduce new qualifications.
- Develop a career pathway for childminders.
- Embed occupational competency in early years and childhood degrees.
- Develop optional training models.
- Support playwork workforce.

What did we do?

National Minimum Standards

In light of considerable changes in the sector, including an extension in 2016 to the upper age limit for childcare registration from 8 to 12 years, a [review](#) of the NMS was completed in July 2019. Work to respond to recommendations was taken forward in 2021. A [consultation](#) took place in 2022 with a summary of responses published in 2023. The refreshed [NMS](#) was published in May 2023.

Early Years and Childhood Degrees

Social Care Wales worked with Higher Education Institutes across Wales to embed practical competency into degree qualifications following concerns that the early years and childcare degrees in Wales did not contain the necessary work-based competency to enable practitioners to be employed on leaving university.

SCW's framework of Required Qualifications for Early Years and Childcare Sector has been updated to include only those early years degrees that demonstrate a required practical competence (practitioner status).

Optional training modules

The Level 4 Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development professional practice [qualification](#) offers optional modules designed to develop the professional practice of the individual (Working with families and carers to develop parenting skills; Working with children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Recognising and supporting children with Additional Learning Needs).

Taking one of these three pathways, this qualification aims to develop the knowledge, understanding, behaviours and skills that underpin their role within the sector offering a progression route for those who may wish to develop their professional practice.

New suite of qualifications

We introduced a new suite of bilingual [childcare qualifications](#) designed to provide a recognised and consistent high-quality standard, as well as clearer pathways for those wanting to progress in their careers. Levels 2 & 3 Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development qualifications launched in September 2019 and levels 4 & 5 in September 2020. The qualifications embed key early years learning principles, and champion a child centred approach, respecting and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. The Level 4 professional practice qualification has recognising and supporting children with Additional Learning Needs as one of its three optional pathways.

Available bilingually, they support our ambition to strengthen practitioners' ability to work in the medium of Welsh. Key sector stakeholders including Cwllwm and Play Wales supported Qualifications Wales and Social Care Wales in the development of the qualifications and have widely promoted them across the sector.

Apprenticeship frameworks were developed to support the new qualifications.

Development of the playwork workforce

The Welsh Government has worked closely with Play Wales and PETC Wales to explore how best to support the playwork and out of school sector. Key playwork qualifications (Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP) and the Playwork Practice Principles (P3)) have been funded via Progress for Success, designed to strengthen the quality and enable progression of the playwork sector.

Funding has also been provided for the development of the Level 3 Award in Transition to Playwork ensuring that those with a Level 3 qualification in childcare/education can be best supported to become a playworker, the qualification which is required for playwork and out of school settings.

Career pathway for childminders and home carers

The [WeCare Wales](#) framework has been designed to showcase the range of roles on offer across the sector and opportunities to develop a career in childcare and playwork. Case studies highlight the important role of childminders.

In addition, new pre-registration units were developed in partnership between SCW and PACEY Cymru setting out opportunities to progress within the wider sector. The Approval of Home Childcare Providers (Wales) Scheme 2021 was published following new legislation. This means that 'approved' Home Carers now hold a qualification listed on SCW's [qualifications framework](#) which aligned the requirements for Home Carers with Childminders.



In addition to the actions we took against the plan's original objectives, we have also...



Provided funding to Cwlwm for Welsh language training and dedicated support to increase the use of Welsh in settings. The funding will support an increase in the numbers of Welsh speakers within the existing workforce to improve Welsh language skills and deliver a continuous programme of professional development for Welsh speakers within the workforce.



Commissioned an [Independent Review of Childminding](#) which was published in June 2023.



Provided funding for Play Wales who have published a play friendly workforce for Wales in 2020 which includes priorities for upskilling the workforce in relation to children's play and developed a qualifications flowchart for those working or seeking to work in playwork.



Provided funding to Cwlwm for research with the sector to understand what support staff and practitioners need to develop, improve and track their professional development, qualifications and skills.



Provided funding to Social Care Wales to develop the [All Wales Induction Framework](#) for early years and childcare and a recognition of international qualifications process to enable those from other countries to enter the workforce in Wales.



Published the Ministerial Review of Play [report](#) in February 2023. The review took place between 2019 and 2022 and follows an in-depth and collaborative review of the Welsh Government's work with respect to play policy by the Play Steering Group.

Investing in building capacity and capability in the sector

Children are at the heart of the childcare and playwork sector

Why is investing in building capacity and capability in the sector important for children?

I need to be able to access childcare and play outside my home.
I need to be able to choose the type of setting that suits me, whether that be a childminder, a Welsh medium cylch or a play setting.
I need a strong and varied childcare and play sector with enough spaces and places for me and other children.



Under this theme we said we would:

- Provide business support via Business Wales.
- Work with Regional Skills Partnerships to develop regional support.
- Explore ways to mitigate the impact of business rates.
- Support the sector via the Development Bank of Wales.
- Develop and maintain the Progress for Success programme.
- Provide apprenticeships.

What did we do?

Business Wales ✓

We have worked with Business Wales to provide business support for the sector. Welsh Government launched two business support grants in September 2019 aimed at supporting new childminder start-ups and enabling existing childcare providers to expand. An [evaluation](#) was carried out in 2021-2022 and published in July 2022.

In recognition of the specific business needs of the workforce, a repository of business support information for the sector was commissioned and developed (2019). In 2020, Welsh Government worked closely with key partners to make this more user friendly and accessible. [Childcare and Playwork Business support web pages](#) were developed and launched in 2021. This sets out the role of different bodies and how they can support settings and highlights local and national support

available. Business Wales [childcare expert sessions](#) went live in March 2022. These include expert speakers on the topics 'Childcare as a business and a vocation' and 'Recruitment and retention in the childcare sector'. A [resource pack](#) is also available.

Regional Skills Partnerships ✓

Regional Skills Partnerships are in place to drive investment in skills by developing responses based upon local and regional need. FE and other provision determined through engagement with businesses and key partners such as Social Care Wales and Cwllwm are present to set out the needs of providers and influence qualification delivery in partnership areas.

Business Rates ✓

Following consultation, all registered full day care premises were given 100% business rate relief exemption for a period of three years (2019-2022). A [review](#) of business rates relief for registered childcare properties was published in July 2021. Following the review, 100% business rates relief exemption was extended to 31 March 2025 to continue to support the sustainability of settings.

Development Bank of Wales ✓

In developing our dedicated childcare and playwork business support web pages, we ensured that information about the Development Bank of Wales is available to assist childcare businesses to grow and expand. A case study setting out how a nursey ([The Green Giraffe Day Nursery](#)) benefitted from this support was also developed.

Progress for Success ✓

The sector benefitted from the ESF funded Progress for Success (PFS) Programme between 2016 – 2023 as it funded access to a number of qualifications for childcare and play practitioners. Welsh Government provided £4.5m over the course of the Programme in addition to the £4.7m provided by ESF funding, to ensure that the Programme can run on a pan-Wales basis. A key focus of the programme was to support practitioners and settings in gaining the required qualifications to meet the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare. The programme funded a number of pathways to support professionals employed within the early years, childcare and play sector to gain nationally recognised qualifications at Levels 2 and 3 across Wales. The Programme also pioneered apprenticeships for those working 10-16 hours a week which were not initially part of the wider Apprenticeship Framework.

Apprenticeship Policy ✓

Welsh Government's Apprenticeship programme plays a key role in supporting the sector to train and upskill. We ensured that we continued to support entry level apprenticeships (level 2) to support introduction of the new qualifications. We also piloted apprenticeships for those working 10-16 hours a week in the Progress for Success Programme.



In addition to the actions we took against the plan's original objectives, we have also...



Expanded the Childcare Offer to parents in education and training, aligned the Foundation Learning Nursery to the Childcare Offer funding rate and increased this rate from £4.50 to £5 per hour with a commitment to review the rate every three years.



Provided capital grants to support capacity increases in the sector, specifically to develop capacity to support Flying Start and Welsh medium provision expansion.



Commenced the expansion of early years provision to all 2 year olds via our Flying Start Programme.



Developed a national digital system to administer the Childcare Offer, providing a quick and easy system for processing childcare settings payments.

2017 Plan: The longer-term vision

In addition to the actions under the three themes, the 10 Year Plan also laid out key elements of a 10 year vision for the childcare and playwork workforce. These built on the three themes outlined above and set an intended direction of travel for workforce policy from 2017 to 2027.

Illustrated below are the original elements of the vision and an update on our delivery of the vision. The 10 year vision for the workforce is now subsumed within the Welsh Government's broader Early Childhood Play Learning and Care (ECPLC) vision outlined in the ECPLC Plan.

Delivering the 10 year vision					
<p>Introduce new qualifications at Levels 4 and 5 to support a practitioners to progress their careers.</p> <p>With Social Care Wales develop a national framework of qualifications and training outlining the sector standards to practice.</p>	<p>Define a career pathway to help practitioners know what they need to progress.</p> <p>Map progression routes to other professions in the wider children's workforce.</p>	<p>Introduce professional registration to recognise continuous professional development and provide public assurance.</p> <p>Consult on the proposal and seek the views of the sector.</p>	<p>Deliver a more integrated Early Childhood Education and Care system in Wales.</p> <p>Streamline expectations and requirement for all early education and care practitioners.</p>	<p>Develop a joint inspection system for private and third sector nurseries which provide Foundation Phase.</p>	<p>Build a bilingual workforce by offering increased routes for new entrants, and existing practitioners, to gain qualifications through the medium of Welsh language skills, and the specific skills needed to work in Welsh-medium settings.</p> <p>Support those working in Foundation Phase settings to deliver the curriculum through the medium of Welsh.</p> <p>Provide training for practitioners in English-medium settings to use more Welsh in their work.</p>

Delivering the 10 year vision : What has been achieved so far?

<p>New qualifications launched in 2019 (Level 2/3) and 2020 (level 4/5).</p> <p>Social Care Wales host the qualifications framework for childcare sector and PETC Wales for the playwork sector. Both have developed flow charts setting out the qualifications required for the childcare and playwork sectors.</p>	<p>Launch of the WeCare Wales framework in 2019 which aims to raise the profile of sector, to promote a career in childcare and the opportunities it offers.</p> <p>A mapping project exploring how those with qualifications in other related sectors may be able to move into a childcare role.</p>	<p>Following the Independent Review on professional registration of the childcare and playwork sector we established a professional registration working group.</p> <p>Working with the professional registration working group we launched a consultation on a workforce register in November 2023.</p>	<p>In 2019, we launched our approach for early childhood play, learning and care (ECPLC), formally known as early childhood education and care (ECEC).</p> <p>ECPLC will build on current programmes and further develop provision of nursery education and care in Wales, to ensure that all babies and young children, irrespective of their background, are supported to have the best start in life and an opportunity to reach their full potential.</p>	<p>CIW and Estyn began inspecting in regulated non-school settings eligible for funding for part-time education in 2019 against a joint inspection framework.</p> <p>During these joint inspections, the care of all children up to the age of 12 and the education of three and four-year-olds that do not receive education in a maintained setting is inspected.</p>	<p>Welsh Government committed to provide £3.78m over three years (2022 – 2025) to support activities to expand Welsh medium childcare and early years provision.</p> <p>The Croesi'r Bont programme has expanded to develop Welsh language immersion skills for childcare practitioners across Wales.</p>
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Key Findings of the 10 Year Plan Review

The review found that significant progress had been made against the actions contained under the three key themes within the 10 Year Plan. In particular:

- The WeCare Wales attraction and recruitment framework has seen the development of a wealth of sector specific case studies and dedicated childcare and playwork campaigns. Campaigns have been responsive to ongoing recruitment and retention concerns and the effects of COVID-19 on the sector. Work taking place to develop the WeCare website will ensure a clearer focus on the early years and childcare sector, supporting recruitment of a diverse workforce. The development of a clear career pathway for all roles across the sector will be a core feature of the refreshed plan.
- In recognition of the ongoing recruitment and retention challenges facing the sector, we have ensured further proactive responses. For example, via the refresh of the National Minimum Standards for regulated childcare, we have amended standard 13 to allow 20% of staff in full day care settings and 10% of staff in sessional or open access settings who are working towards a qualification to be included in the staff qualification ratios. In addition, we have provided funding for SCW to deliver two pilot projects designed to encourage recruitment into the sector; a free introduction to childcare course and a qualifications mapping project.
- Many of the actions contained within the plan have been evaluated or reviewed. This has ensured that any continuation, amendments or further actions have been underpinned by robust evidence. For example, as the Progress for Success programme comes to an end, learning has been taken from the programme and through engagement with key stakeholders to develop a training and support programme for upskilling the workforce.
- Our new suite of qualifications was developed and launched to time in 2019 and 2020 despite the advent of COVID-19 with work continuing to take place to support completion.
- The plan has a clear economic enabling role, as such we have developed strong cross government links which has ensured that we have been able to maximise support for the sector via national initiatives such as React+ and through the development of dedicated childcare and playwork web pages on Working Wales.
- We introduced and extended 100% Business Rates Relief to registered childcare premises. The extension to 30 March 2025 will provide around £10m of additional support for registered childcare premises. This is to ensure we support the sector to address the economic challenges they may be facing including increases in staff wages, pension and other operating costs.

- We have continued support for the sustainability of the sector through funding for required qualifications and an increase in the Childcare Offer rate-we have committed to reviewing this rate every three years. Capital funding schemes have also been designed to support capacity increases across the sector.
- Our plans for professional registration were paused during the pandemic, the independent review set out the steps required to explore the establishment of a workforce registry with the childcare and playwork sector.



Next steps

The review provides a firm foundation for us to build on and outlines areas we can take further. Key areas of work which have not yet been completed will be taken forward through the refreshed plan. These include:

- The development of a clear career pathways for all roles across the childcare and playwork workforce.
- Exploring professional registration of the childcare and playwork workforce with the sector.

In addition, with the publication of the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan we are expanding our work in this area to support and grow a diverse workforce. Work to date has helped us understand the size of the challenge, and what is required for our next steps. Activity and progress on our anti-racist journey will continue for the lifetime of this plan and beyond. The childcare, early years and play workforce remains a key priority for Welsh Government. We will continue to work closely with our key sector stakeholders in supporting the delivery of the refreshed workforce plan which aligns with the ECPLC Plan.

10 Year Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan 2017: Refresh

Next Steps for the 10 Year Workforce Plan

Building on the review of the actions taken to realise the ambitions of the 10 Year Workforce Plan, this section outlines key actions we will be taking over coming years to continue the work and drive forward the objectives of the 10 Year Workforce Plan.

Introduction

Since launch of the 10 Year Workforce Plan in December 2017, much has changed, and the workforce has acutely felt the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, recruitment and retention challenges and the cost-of-living crisis.

This refresh has provided an opportunity to assess and review the direction and vision of our support for the childcare and playwork workforce. As part of this, work has been undertaken to determine whether the original three themes remain relevant in light of the current childcare and playwork landscape and to ensure next steps reflect the current [Programme for Government](#) commitments and the updated ECPLC vision.

The refresh makes use of information and data gathered through engagement with national partners and local authorities on the challenges/issues affecting providers. Engagement with providers and parents over recent years has provided further evidence of the key issues facing those delivering or accessing services. Consideration has also been given to the different challenges/issues facing the sector sourced via reports including Social Care Wales's [National Conversation](#) and the [Early Years Survey](#) commissioned by Cwllwm as well as by a dedicated stakeholder workshop held on 27 March 2023.

Key publications such as [Minding the Future](#), the [Ministerial Review of Play](#), the [Independent Review of Childminding](#), the [Guide to Fair Work](#) and the [Anti Racist Action Plan](#), and work on the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care, have also been considered as part of the refresh. By taking stock of the childcare and playwork landscape and through a collaborative approach with our stakeholders, we are ensuring that we are now setting out the focus, priorities and key actions for the remainder of the plan's lifespan.

The childcare and playwork workforce

This refresh of our 10 Year Workforce Plan provides Welsh Government the opportunity to make clear our ongoing commitment to the childcare and playwork workforce.

The Welsh Government and communities across Wales value and appreciate all those working in the childcare and playwork sector. The refresh of our 10 Year Workforce Plan outlines how we will work with the sector and partners to promote the sector and the key role it plays in supporting and nurturing children.

The refresh also allows us to highlight the crucial role the workforce plays in supporting both children and their families.

We know how rewarding a career in childcare and playwork can be and we want to support the workforce to develop and grow so that they may provide the highest quality provision to the children of Wales both now and in the future.

As set out in our Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Plan we are committed to:

“developing a valued, thriving, diverse and mutually respected workforce committed to high quality”.

We recognise the key role that practitioners play in the early development and learning of children and babies. We want to ensure the workforce feels valued and recognised for the vital role they play in the lives of children. We want to ensure that those who are considering entering the sector see it as a good place to work. A place that offers progression opportunities and a fair and rewarding work environment. This update sets out how we have worked to do that and will continue to do so.



Key actions to 2027

We have outlined what has been achieved to date, but progress is ongoing. There are further actions that we will take over the life of the 10 Year Plan. These are outlined in the following sections under the key themes:

- **Attracting High Quality Recruits**
- **Raising Standards and Skills**
- **Investing in building capacity and capability in the sector**



Attracting high quality recruits

Attracting high quality recruits remains a significant challenge for the sector with retention an increasing concern. Work has been undertaken to promote the sector over recent years, but we know that we can do more to challenge and change perceptions about a career in childcare. We want to ensure childcare and playwork is an attractive, viable and long-term career choice for a diverse range of individuals.

We will remain focused on attracting and retaining quality staff from diverse backgrounds with the right values to work in this hugely valuable sector.

Our overarching ambition is “for those entering the childcare workforce to do so because they view it as a positive and attractive career choice where they will be respected and valued”.

SPOTLIGHT: Fair work

We will establish a Childcare and Playwork Social Partnership Fair Work Forum which will consider key issues for the workforce, such as recruitment, retention, continuing professional development and career progression and explore steps that can be taken to develop fair work practice across the sector.

The Forum will be established in 2024 and will agree a forward work programme which will outline the tangible outputs the Forum will produce to strengthen fair work practice across the sector.

Membership of the group will include childcare and playwork umbrella bodies, local authorities as commissioners of childcare services, trade unions and Welsh Government.

We recognise that the sector continues to experience recruitment and retention issues. In addition to the creation of a Fair Work Forum to focus on a range of workforce issues in more detail, we will take forward further activity on a number of fronts.

To attract new recruits to the sector we will continue to promote working in childcare and playwork through routes such as WeCare Wales, React+, Young Person's guarantee and Working Wales. We will work with SCW to increase the number of childcare and playwork ambassadors. Engagement activity with schools, FE and the public to promote the childcare and playwork sectors will take place.

To attract a diverse and varied workforce we will work with partners and settings to attract recruits from a range of diverse backgrounds which represent the diverse communities they serve. We will develop promotional materials with a focus on diversity and work with community groups to better understand barriers to working in the sector and how Welsh Government can work to remove them.

To support growth in the Welsh language workforce we will continue to work with key partners to increase the number of Welsh speaking recruits to the sector via support for Welsh medium qualifications and practitioner Welsh language support.

To support new entrants we will support new childminders and childminder assistants to access the qualifications they need. We will also consider the recommendations of the childcare mapping pilot project focused on exploring flexibility in recognition of qualifications from other sectors.

To retain the staff we have in the sector we will support SCW to deliver sessions aimed at supporting staff development as well as their wellbeing. We will also develop clear career and progression paths that outline potential next steps for those currently working in the sector.

Raising standards and skills

Raising standards and skills remains a key ambition for the development of a high-quality childcare and playwork workforce. Evidence is clear that high quality provision produces greater benefits for our children and strongly influences their future life chances. Where the workforce is equipped with the knowledge, skills, behaviours and values to provide high quality childcare and playwork, the effects on children can be profound with particular benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, children who are disabled or have additional learning needs.

Our overarching ambition is “to support those in the workforce with their ongoing learning and development needs so that they may realise their full potential”.

SPOTLIGHT: Leadership

In line with our ambition for a high quality and skilled workforce we will support leadership development across the childcare and playwork sector.

As set out in the [Quality Framework](#) for Early Childhood, Play, Learning and Care in Wales, we know that the quality of leadership in childcare and playwork settings has an impact on children’s outcomes, on staff well-being and development and that investing in leadership development makes a positive and long-lasting difference.

We want to support leaders at all levels to focus on what support they need to ensure they can continuously develop their practice and skills and ensure leaders are undertaking the professional learning they need to create high-quality settings for Children.

Our support for leadership development will include:

- Continuing to promote Level 4 and Level 5 leadership and management qualifications including Welsh medium qualifications.
- Delivery of leadership and management professional development sessions.
- Promotion of the ECPLC reflective practice tool via webinars and surveys to support practitioners in their use of the tool as well as to understand how the sector have responded to the introduction of the tool itself.

Supporting newer practitioners to develop their skills and enabling existing staff to continually develop is fundamental to making sure Wales has a strong and high-quality childcare and playwork workforce. Our support for leadership will ensure that those that lead across the sector have the skills to support those they work with, but we will take action to support all elements of the sector in skills development.

To ensure practitioners are suitably qualified, we will continue to support bilingual CCPLD and Playwork qualifications opportunities.

To ensure that staff have the necessary skills and understanding to care for children and nurture their potential, we will support mandatory safeguarding and paediatric first aid training.

To ensure that we support staff to develop their Welsh language skills, we will support Welsh language courses for childcare practitioners through the National Centre for Learning Welsh, funding a co-ordinator to provide key support to learners and support them in opportunities to use Welsh at their settings.

To support and grow diversity the Welsh Government, working with sector partners, seek views of staff from ethnic minority backgrounds on their experiences of working in the sector and co-produce proposals on improving their experiences and career prospects.

To promote inclusivity we will continue to promote and build upon DARPL professional learning resources and explore opportunities to embed anti racist principles in existing qualifications and support an inclusive approach to the provision of childcare and play.

Support the ongoing professional development of the workforce, we will fund SCW to deliver learning informed by sector needs.

To progress the aim of recognising the childcare and playwork sector as a profession we will consider the outcome of the consultation on professional registration of the childcare and playwork workforce seeking the sector's views on a workforce register.

Investing in building capacity and capability in the sector

The sustainability of settings remains a key issue. We want to ensure we have a strong sector with enough settings of all types to support the children of Wales. We will work to support settings to grow and thrive to enable them to meet the needs of families and children.

Our overarching ambition is “to utilise all available levers to sustain and grow high quality childcare and playwork”.

SPOTLIGHT:

Expansion of Flying Start to all two-year olds

Our Programme for Government commits us to continue our support for our flagship Flying Start programme. And, in line with the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru, we have extended this commitment to deliver a phased expansion of early years provision to include all two-year-olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh-medium provision.

This is part of the Welsh Government's wider vision for developing early childhood play, learning and care (ECPLC) (formally known as early childhood education and care (ECEC)).

During 2023-24 and 2024-25 we will invest £46 million in expanding Flying Start childcare to support long-term, positive impacts on the lives of those children and families across Wales facing the greatest challenges.

In 2023-24, we supported over 4,500 additional 2-year-olds to access high quality Flying Start Childcare. In 2024-25, we anticipate supporting around 5,200 additional 2-year-olds with access to high quality childcare.

We recognise that our future aims for childcare and playwork and our ECPLC vision can only be delivered if we have a strong sector which can help us deliver for the families of Wales. The Flying Start expansion increases the availability of government funded provision. But in tandem with this we need to ensure we are supporting the capability of the sector, now and into the future.

To support and grow the Welsh medium sector we will work with partners to increase the number of Welsh medium after school clubs and childminders.

To support settings to be financially sustainable we will review both the provision of 100% business rates relief and the Childcare Offer rate in line with the agreed review cycle linking to our social partnership childcare and playwork fair work forum.

To ensure settings can access key business advice on sustainability, we will work with Business Wales to promote and provide bespoke business support to childcare and playwork settings. This will build on existing dedicated webpages, Expert Sessions and bespoke advice.

To support and grow childminding in Wales we will work with the Childminding Recommendations Review Group to take forward the findings of the Childminding Review.

To support future policy development, we will complete a workforce mapping and modelling project of the childcare and playwork workforce to understand the current makeup and structure of the workforce and inform future needs.

To support growth of a diverse sector we will establish a dedicated working group where sector stakeholders will work alongside people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to identify barriers faced by these communities in accessing services. The working group will make recommendations on how barriers can be removed to ensure equality of access to services.
