



Childminder COVID-19 support survey

John Healey, MP for Wentworth and Dearne

November 2020

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Introduction: John Healey MP

In August, I launched an online survey to hear the views of childminders to check the impact of Covid-19 on the early years workforce and to hear their views on how the sector needs to be supported throughout this crisis. I was concerned to hear from local childminders that they were struggling financially during this crisis with many having to close their businesses as a result of the pandemic. Such a scenario could result in a shortage of childcare places for parents returning to work after the pandemic.

Most childminders are self-employed, but one in three have not been able to access support from the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS). Meanwhile, demand for childcare has reduced significantly due to the Covid-19 pandemic as parents worry for the safety of their child in a childcare setting and many have been made redundant, placed on furlough or are working from home.

Despite these challenges, childminders have shown incredible resilience throughout this crisis - playing a crucial role to ensure that key workers are able to continue working. Just half were able to continue working in lockdown and three in four childminders charged parents no fees during this period. However, childminders need support. The significant reduction in demand will continue for the foreseeable future as we enter another national lockdown and demand is unlikely to recover to pre-crisis levels until vaccinations are widely completed and the economy has largely recovered.

The findings of this survey demonstrate just how significantly the drop in demand for childcare is affecting childminders, who rely on parental fees for income. Moreover, it demonstrates that the Government is yet again failing to help those who need with its SEISS despite an overwhelming majority of childminders being self-employed.

The survey asked if childminders have received other forms of financial support throughout the pandemic such as mortgage holidays, loans and help from family and friends, whether the guidance provided by the Government to ensure they can reopen safely has been clear enough, and what further worries do they have as we enter the winter months of this pandemic.

The findings of this survey will be grim reading for those in Whitehall, who are currently overseeing a crisis in our early years sector and yet are asleep at the wheel. The sector was already struggling prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and relied far too much on low wages, long hours and poor upskilling opportunities. Covid-19 and the lack of Government support is exacerbating these pre-existing issues. I will now present the findings of this survey to the Secretary of State for Education, and I will discuss the conclusions with Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Education. Moreover, councils must play a greater role in ensuring that childminders are given the necessary support and guidance they need. I will therefore be meeting with local council leaders to discuss how further support can be delivered.

John Healey MP
November 2020

Key Findings

- More than 600 childminders responded to the survey with one in five from the Yorkshire and Humberside region.
- 95% childminders stated that their childminding work is their only source of income and 99% of childminders have experienced a loss of income since Covid-19 measures were announced.
- Prior to Covid-19 measures were introduced in March, just under half (48%) earned less than £15,000 a year.
- Whilst 99% of childminders are registered as self-employed, only 65% of childminders have been able to access funding from the Self-employed Income Support Scheme. Moreover, 61% of respondents believe the Government financial support has not been enough.
- 49% of respondents were able to continue working during lockdown to provide childcare for key workers or vulnerable children
- 73% did not charge parents, who did not use their childminding places, any fees during lockdown whilst 23% charged reduced fees.
- 69% believe that Government guidance on reopening safely has been either somewhat unclear or very unclear.
- 85% of respondents believe the Government should have done more to support childminders during the pandemic.
- 48% of childminders fear their business is at risk of closure by the end of the year.

Key Conclusions

The introduction of a new national lockdown and expectation we will be facing tight public health restrictions over the winter months, makes a strong case for Government action to support childminders throughout this crisis. It is important that we maintain childcare capacity in the sector for when this pandemic is over, and workers return to offices and workplaces. The pre-existing issues in the childminder sector and gaps within the SEISS mean that childminders have been disproportionately negatively affected by this pandemic. Therefore, this survey makes the strong case for the Government to:

- Provide targeted financial support to childminders to prevent closures.
- Review the current public health guidance for childminders and provide sector specific guidance for home-based care. Currently the guidance for the early years workforce has just one of forty three pages of the early years public health guidance is tailored to childminders.
- Create a roadmap for the early years sector, including childminders, to resolve the underlying pre-Covid issues in the sector such as the prevalence of below minimum wage pay.
- Stop childminders from falling through the cracks in the SEISS and allow newly self-employed childminders to claim the Grant.
- Put childminders at the front of the queue along with frontline staff in schools, hospitals and care homes for testing and vaccinations.
- Make childminders more central to local council early years plans and offer more advice and support.

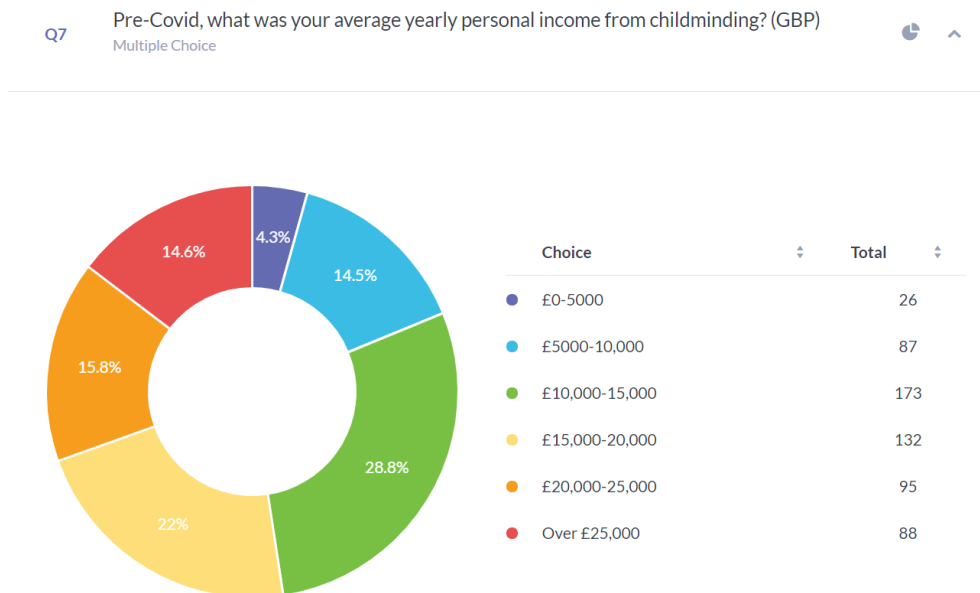
Survey Results, Analysis and Commentary

John Healey MP launched the survey due to concerns that childminders in the local region were struggling throughout this crisis. The survey ran from August 17 until September 28 2020 and therefore the responses pre-date the second nationwide lockdown from November 5 2020. The survey was publicised on the MP’s website and social media accounts. John also sent out letters to Ofsted registered childminders in Rotherham and Barnsley to encourage them to participate in the survey. Moreover, the survey was also picked up by the local newspaper the Rotherham Advertiser as well as the national news site ITV News - a fact which has no doubt contributed to the high volume of respondents from across the UK. The survey was accessible through the survey application *Survey Planet*, which allowed for both closed multiple choice questions and open-ended questions. This allowed for both quantitative and qualitative data to be utilised and analysed in the process of creating this report. The survey was very popular with 603 responses from all corners of the UK. Of these respondents, 20% were from Yorkshire and Humberside with eight of these being local constituents in Wentworth and Dearne.

The survey highlights how Covid-19 is having a disproportionate impact on childminders - a group particularly vulnerable to sudden drops in demand due to their reliance on parental fees for income. Moreover, the respondents are overwhelmingly self-employed (99%), the majority (74%) are well established childminders for over five years and overwhelmingly again, the workforce is female (99%).

Covid-19 and lockdown

The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated existing, long term issues facing childminders. Prior to the pandemic, just under half (48%) claim they earned less than £15,000 a year on average

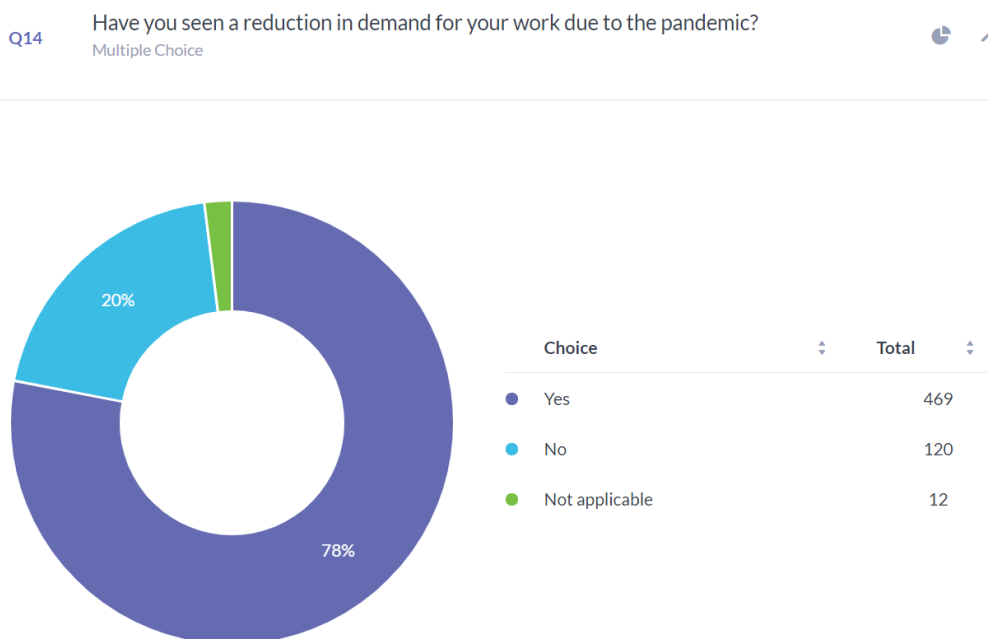


Why have childminders seen a reduction in demand for their services?

- Parents are working from home due to Government guidance
- Parents have been furloughed and therefore do not need childcare as they are unable to work
- Parents have been made unemployed and therefore cannot afford childcare

despite the average working week reportedly being 45.25 hours according to the findings of this survey. This would mean that childminders on average earn £7.21 per hour - below the minimum wage for anyone over the age of 21. Moreover, 95% of respondents claim that their childminding work is their only source of employment. These findings support existing studies that demonstrate the childminding sector is propped up by low wages.

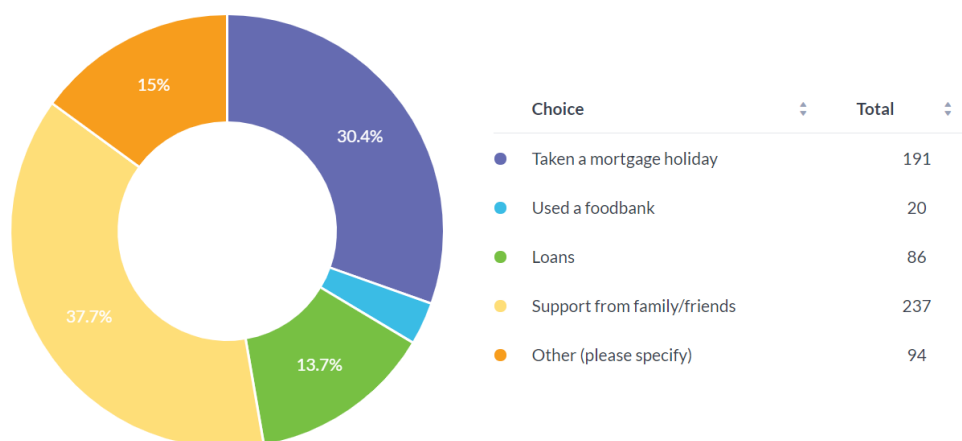
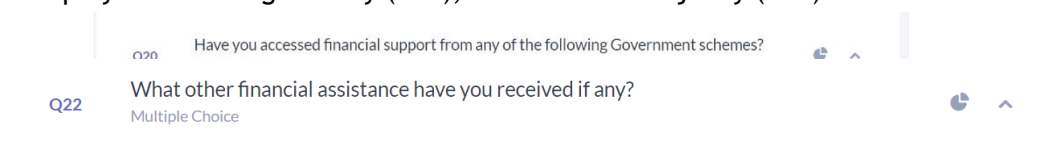
Covid-19 has worsened the picture for an already struggling sector. 99% of childminders report they have seen a loss of income since Covid-19 measures were announced. A large portion of this can be explained by the reduction in demand in work for childminders with 78% reporting that there has been a reduction in demand due to the pandemic. Many childminders attribute this to the current working from home guidance for parents as now many parents do not need childcare whilst working and instead opt to look after their children themselves at home. Moreover, reduced incomes for parents are also seen as a reason why demand is down with many parents being made redundant or being placed on furlough and therefore unable to work so childcare is no longer necessary. This has meant that 72% of childminders claim they are now open but on a reduced income. Only 1 in 5 childminders are operating normally with no reduced income. 4% are also reporting they've ceased offering their services and remain closed.



Childminders have also had to take on the financial burden of acquiring the appropriate PPE and cleaning supplies necessary to ensure their workplace is COVID-secure and safe to reopen. Whilst employers, workers and the self-employed across the country have to bear this burden, this is particularly important to note for childminders as most childminders work from home. Therefore, ensuring that not only their workplace is safe also means they need to ensure their home is safe after work, which can add extra challenges and stresses for childminders.

Financial support

The drop in demand and reduced income for childminders has meant many have relied on financial support from the Government. However, despite 99% of childminders reporting that they are registered as self-employed, only 65% have been able to access SEISS funding. Whilst the number of self-employed childminders able to claim the SEISS is significantly higher than self-employed workers generally (20%),¹ the fact the majority (74%) of childminders are well-



established, experienced childminders for over five years may explain this difference as there are less newly self-employed childminders. Newly self-employed childminders are unable to claim the SEISS due to its requirement for self-employed workers to have tax returns filed for the year 2018/2019. Whilst the Chancellor claimed when he announced the SEISS, that it “is fair [and] targeted at those who need it the most,” and that those who fail to qualify for the SEISS can be supported through the range of other financial support schemes, the findings of this survey do not support this argument. 38% of childminders have had to rely on financial support from family and/or friends, 30% have had to take mortgage holidays, 14% have taken out bank loans, and 4% have had to resort to relying on food banks in 21st century Britain.

The lack of a comprehensive support package for childminders has led to 61% of childminders believing the financial support for childminders has not been enough to help them through this pandemic. As a result, almost half (48%) believe their business is at risk of closure. If you use this figure nationally, utilising the 2019 Survey of Childcare and Early Year providers,² which found there are 239,700 registered childminder places, 115,056 are at risk across the country.

¹ Healey, John. (2020). *Self-employed COVID-19 Support Survey*, available at: http://www.johnhealeym.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/John-Healey-MP-self-employed-survey-report-July-2020_.pdf

² Department for Education. (2019). *Childcare and Early Year Providers Survey 2019*, available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/845080/SCEYP_2019_Main_Report_Nov19.pdf

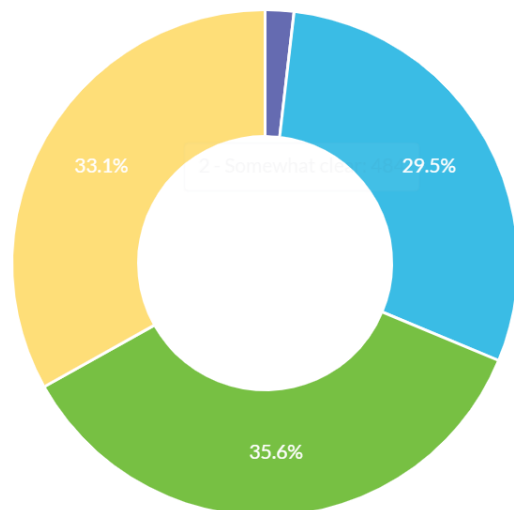
Unclear guidance

Reopening has been a major challenge for childminders, largely due to the aforementioned issue of many childminders working from home and therefore they are worried about placing themselves at greater risk of catching Covid-19. As a result, many childminders have complained that Government guidance on reopening safely has not been tailored to childminders and instead the guidance is much more heavily tailored for maintained childcare settings such as nurseries, who have very different working environments and needs to childminders. This has led to a feeling among many childminders that they've been forgotten about. This is particularly frustrating for many childminders given many worked throughout lockdown with almost half (49%) claiming they remained open during lockdown to provide childcare for the children of key workers and/or vulnerable children. Moreover, 73% did not charge parents, who's children were not receiving childcare, fees for their places over this period and 23% charged only reduced fees. Remaining open allowed keyworkers such as NHS and care staff to continue working throughout the peak of the pandemic, save lives and protect our public services.

However, many childminders anecdotally claim they are put at greater risk in the guidance, such as exempting them from local and national public health restrictions on household mixing indoors and yet provided no specific guidance for childminders to help them manage the risk. As a result, 69% of childminders believe Government guidance is either somewhat unclear or very unclear.

Q19

Do you think the Government's guidance on reopening safely has been clear?
Rating



Choice	Rating	Total
1 - Very clear	30	30
2 - Somewhat clear	484	242
3 - Somewhat unclear	585	195
4 - Very unclear	544	136

Overwhelmingly however, childminders are most uncertain about when they are required to close if a child or a family member of a child in their care, tests positive for Covid-19. Current government guidance does not state that childminders need to close or self-isolate if a child in their care tests positive for Covid-19, even if they have come into close contact with the child. They currently only need to self-isolate if they develop symptoms themselves or if they have

been contacted by NHS Test and Trace and asked to self-isolate. However, many childminders are uncertain about whether they could be asked to self-isolate on multiple occasions by NHS Test and Trace and therefore forced to close and lose out on income as a result. Whilst the introduction of an NHS Test and Trace Support payment of £500 will ease this financial burden, it is only available to those who claim:

- Universal Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Income-based Employment and Support Allowance
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income Support
- Housing Benefit
- Pension Credit

Moreover, the payment is £200 less than the minimum wage for two weeks of full-time work. The payment will therefore fail to make up for the financial hit childminders will feel when they are required to self-isolate. These reasons are why 85% of childminders believe that the Government should have done more to support childminders throughout this pandemic.

Related Surveys and Reports

A report by the Social Mobility Commission published in August 2020 details just how much the childcare sector as a whole was struggling even before the coronavirus pandemic. Across the entire early years workforce, the average wage was £7.42 an hour, well below the average total population's wage (£12.57) and the female workforces' average wage (£11.37).³ More worryingly, 13% of the early years workforce earned less than £5 per hour. The Commission found also that 11% of the early years workforce worked more than 42 hours per week, compared to just 3% of retail workers, and 6% of the overall female workforce⁴. These findings therefore support some of the findings of this childcare survey which found almost half of childminders earn less than £15,000 annually for an average working week of 42 hours⁵.

The report also found specifically that childminders are facing three main challenges⁶:

- Unstable income - childminders largely rely on parental fees for income and therefore only receive income for the time a child is cared for. This means that when parents are made redundant, put on furlough or work from home and need less childcare, childminders see an immediately drop in income - making them particularly vulnerable in this coronavirus pandemic.
- Increased competition from maintained settings - the Commission found this is largely due to the introduction of funded hours
- The lack of sick or holiday pay means that they may lose income if they are unable to work due to being sick or unwell. This can cause long term issues if a parent finds

³ The Social Mobility Commission. (2020). 'The stability of the early years workforce in England: an examination of national, regional and organisational barriers,' available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stability-of-the-early-years-workforce-in-england>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

another childminder/childcare provider who is more consistently able to work and moves permanently.

PACEY conducted a survey in May of 1,000 parents of 1-6 year olds which shines a light on the reasons for the significant drop in demand for childminders found in this report's survey. It found that in May, almost half (48%) were not planning on sending their children back into childcare⁷. The biggest reasons for this were: that parents planned to look after their children at home (85%), worries about social distancing being possible to enforce with young children from different households (70%) and concerns about their child's health (60%)⁸. These findings help to explain the significant drop in demand for childcare as parents continue to work from home and therefore can look after their children at home whilst working, and parents worry for their child's health in a setting where they would be mixing with multiple households. The drop in demand has also been observed by Department for Education statistics which shows only 61% of children, who usually attend early years settings in term time, were attending as of October 29⁹. Whilst this figure is up from 25% on July 9¹⁰, it represents a huge drop in demand for early years practitioners, which will particularly hurt childminders due to their reliance on parental fees and not public funding from early years entitlement.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) highlights how childminders have been particularly hard hit by the coronavirus crisis. They have estimated that even if all childminders were able to receive funding from the SEISS, 30% of them would earn £4 of income per every £5 of costs¹¹. The sector is therefore becoming financially unviable and risks thousands of childminders going out of business leaving a shortage of childcare places when demand returns to pre-crisis levels, such as when a vaccine is developed and widely distributed. This would unfortunately not only see an overwhelmingly female sector with large scale unemployment, but in the long term, the lack of childcare availability will negatively impact the wider female workforce the most. A Pregnant Then Screwed survey of 19,950 mothers and pregnant women this summer found that 46% of mothers blame their redundancy on their lack of childcare provision during the coronavirus crisis and 81% of mothers say they need childcare to return to work.¹² If 48% of childminders close across the UK by the end of the year because they cannot afford to stay open and the Government has provided insufficient financial support, when workers are required to eventually return to work, there will be a significant reduction in childcare capacity to cope with the demand. As a result, women are most likely to be disproportionately affected by this. The TUC has claimed that not having enough childcare for parents "risks

⁷ PACEY, (2020). 'NEWS: PACEY survey reveals half of parents too worried to send their children to childcare,' available at: <https://www.pacey.org.uk/news-and-views/news/archive/2020-news/may-2020/pacey-survey-reveals-half-of-parents-too-worried-t/>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Department for Education (17 November 2020), *Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

¹⁰ Department for Education (16 July 2020), *Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak*, available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/2020-week-28>

¹¹ Institute for Fiscal Studies. (2020). 'Challenges for the childcare market: the implications of COVID-19 for childcare providers in England,' available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14990>

¹² Pregnant Then Screwed (2020). *Childcare, Covid and Career: The true scale of the crisis facing working mums*, available at: <https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/childcare-covid-and-career/>

reversing decades of progress women have made in the labour market, and increasing the gender pay gap.”¹³

It's therefore very clear based upon the findings of this survey and wider research in this area, that the early years sector is in dire need of Government assistance to counteract the significant reduction in demand for childcare. This reality is particularly stark for childminders who are more vulnerable to sudden reductions in demand due to their reliance on parental fees. Moreover, the pandemic and the need for extra PPE and cleaning supplies to ensure a childminder's work environment and home are safe for themselves, the children in their care and their staff means additional costs are placing an increased burden on a sector which prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, relied on low wage labour - sometimes below the minimum wage. As a result, urgent Government financial support is needed to prevent childminders from going out of business - a reality that would disproportionately affect an overwhelmingly female workforce. The possibility of childminder capacity being almost halved by next year as the findings of this survey suggest, would cause a long term reduction in the supply of childcare that will make parents returning to work, when it is safe to do so, a significant challenge. Such a challenge, as both the TUC and Pregnant Then Screwed have alluded to, would inevitably hit the overall female workforce the hardest and undo some of the substantial progress we have made as a country to close the gender pay gap and ensuring our workplaces are free from sex-based barriers to work.

Appendix 1: Respondent location data

Location	Number of respondents
Wentworth and Dearne	8
Yorkshire and Humberside (excluding W+D)	99
Rest of the UK	426
Did not answer	70
Total	603

Appendix 2: Survey questions

Q1. Please state your full name

Q2. Is your childminding work your only source of employment

- a. Yes
- b. No

Q3. How many years have you worked as a childminder?

¹³ TUC (2020). *Forced out: the cost of getting childcare wrong*, available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/forced-out-cost-getting-childcare-wrong>

- a. Less than 1 year
- b. Between 1 and 2 years
- c. Between 2 and 5 years
- d. More than 5 years

Q4. Before Covid-19 restrictions, how many hours per week did you usually work as a childminder?

Q5. How many children did you usually childmind before Covid-19 restrictions?

Q6. Are you registered as self-employed for your work as a childminder?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Q7. Pre-Covid, what was your average yearly personal income from childminding? (GBP)

- a. £0-5,000
- b. £5,000-10,000
- c. £10,000-15,000
- d. £15,000-20,000
- e. £20,000-25,000
- f. Over £25,000

Q8. Has your business experienced a loss of income since Covid-19 measures were announced by the Government?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Q9. Were you able to continue working during lockdown to provide childcare for key workers/vulnerable children?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not applicable

Q10. Did you charge parents any fees during lockdown?

- a. Yes - the same
- b. Yes - reduced
- c. No

Q11. What is the current status of your childminding business?

- a. Operating normally
- b. Operating with reduced income

- c. Closed
- d. Other (please specify)

Q12. If you have closed, is this because of the impact of Covid-19?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Q13. If you are open, how many children do you currently look after?

- a. 0-5
- b. 5-10
- c. 10-15
- d. Over 15
- e. Not applicable

Q14. Have you seen a reduction in demand for your work due to the pandemic?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not applicable

Q15. Do you believe your business risks closure by the end of the year?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Q16. Do you employ any members of staff?

- a. No
- b. Yes - state how many

Q17. If you answered 'yes' to question 16, have you put any members of staff on the furlough scheme?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not applicable

Q18. If you answered 'yes' to question 17, do you believe the end of the furlough scheme will mean you need to make redundancies?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Q19. Do you think the Government guidance on reopening safely has been clear?

- a. Very clear
- b. Somewhat clear
- c. Somewhat unclear
- d. Very unclear

Q20. Have you accessed financial support from any of the following schemes?

- a. Self-employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS)
- b. Early years education entitlement funding
- c. Universal Credit
- d. Employment Support Allowance
- e. Other (please specify)

Q21. Did you have any difficulties accessing these schemes?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Q22. What other financial assistance have you received if any?

- a. Taken a mortgage holiday
- b. Used a food bank
- c. Loans
- d. Support from family and friends
- e. Other (please specify)

Q23. Do you think the Government financial support provided to childminders has been enough?

- a. Yes
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not enough
- d. Other

Q24. Do you think there is anything the Government could have done better to support childminders during the pandemic?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Q25. How else could the Government help childminders throughout this crisis as we emerge from lockdown?

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Q26. What childminders do you believe childminders face during the Covid-19 crisis and beyond?

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Q27. Thank you for taking part in this survey. To finish, I have some questions about you:

- a. Title
- b. First name
- c. Second name

- d. Age
- e. Gender
- f. Home address
- g. Postcode
- h. Email address
- i. Re-type email address