

Early Learning and Childcare Cost Collection Survey- Guidance (Childminders)

This document supports childminders completing the ELC Cost Collection survey. This survey is being carried out by Diffley Partnership, an independent research company, on behalf of Scottish Government and COSLA. Each question is explained with:

- Why it's being collected – context for informing sustainable funding rate setting.
- What we are collecting – the data point required.
- How/where to find it – practical help for locating the information.

Section 1: Provider Information

Question	Why it's being collected	What we are collecting	How/where to find it
Which of the following do you operate? (Childminder / Day care of children)	To compare costs across different service types.	The type of childcare service you operate.	This is on your Care Inspectorate certificate or online registration listing.
What is the name of the service that you operate?	To uniquely identify each provider and match with regulatory data (confidentially). Also to ensure no provider appears twice in the dataset.	Your service name, as used in formal registration.	As shown on your Care Inspectorate certificate.
Please provide the Care Inspectorate Registration number(s) of your service?	To uniquely identify each provider and match with regulatory data (confidentially). Also to ensure no provider appears twice in the dataset.	Your official Care Inspectorate registration number(s).	On your registration certificate or Care Inspectorate website.
What is the postcode of your service?	Allows geographic analysis of costs to inform local authority rate decisions. It also allows for comparisons between rural, remote, island, and urban services.	The full postcode of your childcare service.	Refer to your official address or registration details.

Section 2: Capacity and Operations

Question	Why it's being collected	What we are collecting	How/where to find it
<p>Please provide the following information</p> <p>a) The number of weeks of the year your service is open?</p> <p>b) The number of hours per week that your service is open?</p>	Shows operational scale and enables calculation of hourly cost estimates.	Number of weeks per year and hours per week your service is open.	Use your timetable or calendar.
What is the maximum number of places for children that your service is registered to provide?	To help capture any variations in costs of delivery across services of different sizes/capacity.	The total number of children you're registered to care for.	Listed on your Care Inspectorate certificate under conditions of registration.
<p>Please provide an estimate of the percentage of children who attend your service who have additional support needs (note - please cover all cases where additional support is required, and your response should not be limited to just cases where there is a formal diagnosis)</p>	<p>ELC provision must be delivered in a way that ensures equality of access for, and accounts for the varying needs of, all children. This will mean that some children will require more support, which could be through increased staff time, access to specialist staff support, or through access to specific equipment.</p> <p>Responses to this question will help to inform our understanding of how supporting children with a disability or additional support needs impacts on overall costs of delivering funded ELC; and how this may vary across different types of providers.</p>	A child has additional support needs if, for any reason, they need extra or different help to benefit fully from their ELC experience.	Information may be included on your registers or management systems. If information is not easily accessible then please provide an estimate.

Which of these best describes your premises?	Different property arrangements can create different cost burdens.	Your tenure status (renting, owning, etc.).	Lease, mortgage, or funding agreements.

Section 3: Sessions and Fees

Question	Why it's being collected	What we are collecting	How/where to find it
Please enter the typical number of hours provided for each of the following type of sessions a) Hours per half day session b) Hours per full day session c) Hours per wraparound session	To understand how care is structured and compare delivery models.	Length in hours of half-day and full-day sessions.	Check your programme schedule or offer to parents.
Standard fee structure	To understand fee levels.	Fees charged for sessions and wraparound hours by age group. The question asks for a split by under 3s and over 3s. If you have a different age group pricing structure then you can provide any additional information in the next question.	Use your pricing list.
Is there any further information you would like to provide on your fee structure?	In order to enhance our understanding of fees.	Any additional information you wish to provide.	Reflect on your fee structure.

Section 4: Income and Expenditure

Question	Why it's being collected	What we are collecting	How/where to find it
Preferred reporting period: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 2025 • Financial Year 	To understand which time period data is being reported for.	Your choice of April 2025 or yearly data reporting.	Choose based on how you maintain financial records or what makes providing subsequent information easiest for you.
And what financial year do you use? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April-March • January-December Other [please specify	To understand which time period data is being reported for.	Financial year for the data being collected	
For each of the following age groups please provide either: (1) the total number of hours; or (2) the number of half-day and full-day sessions you delivered on average per week during the time period for which you are providing financial information?	<p>To understand the total amount of childcare that you are contracted to deliver by age group.</p> <p>This supports the calculation of estimated cost per hour.</p>	<p>Volume of childcare provision at your service.</p> <p>We understand that childminders will have their own management systems, which will capture this information differently.</p> <p>We also understand that there will be times when children are unable to attend due to illness or holidays. You do not need to adjust for this as the survey just requires information on the childcare that you are contracted to deliver.</p> <p>Please choose the option that is easiest for you to complete. If you</p>	Use management systems, invoicing systems or registers.

		are able to provide the total number of hours by age group then you do not need to provide any information on the number of half-day and full-day sessions (and vice versa).	
Has the number of funded ELC hours you have been commissioned to provide increased, decreased or stayed the same over the last year?	To understand the contribution that delivery of funded ELC makes to providers, and how this can vary across different types of providers.	Whether, in the current year, you have faced an increase, decrease, or no change in the funded hours that you are delivering.	Use attendance logs, management systems, or registers.
Please provide the following information? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total annual/monthly business income • Total annual/monthly expenditure 	Foundational for calculating cost per hour.	Total spend for the reporting period. Please provide only costs that relate to your business. Please also think of costs related to working outside of normal hours that you may incur.	Use bookkeeping, accounts, or financial statements.
Do you employ any other paid staff for your childminding service other than yourself?	In order to ensure we only ask relevant questions based on whether you have paid staff other than yourself.	Whether or not your service has any paid staff beyond yourself.	
Can you please break your expenditure down by the following (£)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own Salary • Staff Salaries [IF APPLICABLE] • National Insurance Contributions 	Breaks total costs into specific categories to identify major cost elements. This will enable understanding across different types of providers of the share of costs accounted for by these elements.	Amounts spent on staff salaries, National Insurance, pensions, property, and other running costs. Please provide only costs that relate to your business.	Use your accounting software or breakdowns in financial reports.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxes other than NI contributions • Pension Contributions (including personal pension contributions) • Mortgage/rent • Other running costs (excluding mortgage/rent) 	<p>This extra level of detail, in particular on staffing costs, will enable better understanding of the potential impacts on the costs of delivery for providers of any policy changes. For example, the recent changes to employer National Insurance Contributions by the UK Government which took effect from April 2025.</p>		
<p>What is the average level (percentage) of net surplus/profit/return on investment that your setting needs to return to remain sustainable?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 0-5% 2. 6-10% 3. 11-15% 4. 16-20% 5. 21-25% 6. 26-30% 7. 30%+ 	<p>The sustainable rate should be set at a level that will allow for investment in your service – whether this is in staff, resources and/or physical environment (please see the sustainable rates guidance for more information).</p> <p>In order to inform future rate setting we require estimates of average levels of reinvestment/surplus across different childcare providers.</p> <p>We will be able to produce an estimate of reinvestment/surplus, using the expenditure and income data you provide, for the period of time covered in your return. However,</p>	<p>The average level (percentage) of net surplus/profit/return on investment that your service needs to remain sustainable.</p> <p>We understand that this can fluctuate on an annual basis, so we are looking for the average rate that you may look to achieve over a number of years.</p>	<p>Reflect on your financial planning or business model.</p>

	we appreciate that reinvestment/surplus levels can fluctuate between years, dependent on decisions taken by individual services. Therefore, this question asks you to provide the average level (percentage) of net surplus/profit/return on investment that your service needs to return to remain sustainable.		
Would you be willing to provide a more detailed breakdown of your income. Note, this is optional and will be used to better understand the income and expenditure of services providing funded ELC. This information is optional.	To understand whether you would be interested in providing more detailed income information.	Whether you would like to provide more detailed income information.	Discretionary based on your preference.
Thinking about this income, what percentage of your total income came from the following? If a particular income source does not apply please enter '0' in the box. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funded ELC Payments: _____ (%) Private Fees from Parents: _____ (%) Other Government Funding: _____ (%) Non-Government Grants: _____ (%) 	The responses will inform our understanding of sources of income across different types of providers. In particular, it is important to understand the contribution that income received for delivering funded ELC hours makes to providers overall income.	<p>Income from funded hours, parent fees, donations, and other sources.</p> <p>Not all of the potential income sources will be relevant for all types of providers. You only need to provide information for the sources relevant to your service.</p>	Use accounting records or income breakdowns from your financial system.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donations and Fundraising: _____ (%) • Universal Credit: _____ (%) • Community/Supported Childminding/Social Work: _____ (£) • _____ • Other (please specify): _____ (%) 			
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Section 5: Cost of Delivering ELC

Question	Why it's being collected	What we are collecting	How/where to find it
What is the average estimated cost to your service per hour of delivery regardless of whether funded or not?	<p>To understand if you face any differences in the cost of delivering ELC to 2 year olds relative to 3-5 year olds in your service.</p> <p>The same question is being asked of day care of children services who face different staffing ratios for children aged 2 year olds and those aged 3-5 years old.</p> <p>Reflecting this, the majority of local authorities pay a higher sustainable rate for delivery of funded ELC to 2 year olds, than they do for 3-5 year olds.</p>	<p>Your estimated average cost to deliver an hour of care for each group.</p>	<p>Divide total cost by total hours delivered for each group.</p> <p>We understand that many of your costs are for the whole setting and they cannot be apportioned to one age group. However, if possible, it would be helpful if you were able to reflect if there are any differences in your average costs for delivering to 2 year olds relative to 3-5 year olds.</p>

	<p>However, as previous cost collection exercises have not requested separate data for 2 year old provision, robust evidence on the extent of variations in the cost of delivery is not currently available. There is also currently greater variation in the rates being paid to funded providers for 2 year old children across local authorities relative to the variation in rates paid to 3-5 year olds.</p>		
<p>What accounts for any differences in costs across 2 year olds and 3-5 year olds?</p>	<p>To enable us to understand if the reasons for any cost differences in delivering childcare to 2 year olds relative to 3-5 year olds.</p>	<p>Any additional information that you wish to provide regarding cost differences in delivering childcare to children aged 2 years olds relative to 3-5 year olds.</p>	<p>Reflect on any differences that you face in delivering childcare to 2 year olds relative to 3-5 year olds.</p>

Section 6: Meals

Question	Why it's being collected	What we are collecting	How/where to find it
Do you provide meals in your service?	To understand whether meal provision is part of your funded ELC delivery model.	Whether meals are provided as part of your service.	Reflect on your daily routine of delivery.
How are meals provided by your service?	To understand how meals are delivered in your service. This will also help to determine if differences in how the meal is delivered can impact on the cost of meal provision in services.	Sources and preparation method for meals.	Review your contracts, in-house kitchen setup or council support.
What is the estimated full cost of providing the free meal commitment per meal for each child (£)?	<p>Every child attending a funded ELC session – which is any session that includes funded hours, regardless of whether they are mixed with ‘paid for’ hours – is to be provided with a free meal. Your response to this question will help to ensure that we have robust and reliable information on the full costs to providers of delivering this commitment.</p> <p>To fully quantify meal-related costs borne by the service. This will help to inform future payments to funded providers for the delivery of the free meal commitment.</p>	<p>Actual cost per meal delivered under the free meal commitment.</p> <p>You should provide an estimate of the total cost of providing a free meal to each child. This should reflect all costs involved in delivery of the meal and should not be limited to just the costs of purchasing the food.</p> <p>Where meals are delivered to your service, either by an external caterer or your local authority, you should also consider any costs related to serving the meal within your service.</p>	Calculate cost of ingredients, preparation, time, utilities.

Section 7: Staff Costs

Question	Why it's being collected	What we are collecting	How/where to find it
In the table below please provide the average number of hours per week that you work which are: (1) paid hours; and (2) unpaid hours.	To understand the average number of hours that you work in a typical week, and how many of these are unpaid.	The average hours you work per week that are both paid for hours and unpaid hours.	Use bookkeeping, accounts, or financial statements.
Do you currently contribute towards a pension scheme for yourself? 1. Yes 2. No	To understand if you are able to contribute to a pension scheme.	Whether and to what extent you are able to contribute towards for yourself.	Check your pension statement.
What is the average percentage contribution that you make towards a pension scheme for yourself?	To understand the level of pension contribution that childminders are able to make for themselves. This forms part of the overall staffing costs for your service.	The average percentage you contribute to pension schemes for yourself.	Check your pension statement.
What is the average percentage contribution that you make towards a pension scheme for employees?	To quantify the financial impact of pension contributions and ensure sustainable funding rates can account for typical employer contributions across the sector.	The average percentage you contribute to pension schemes for your eligible employees. You only have to answer this question if you employ staff to work in your service.	Look at pension scheme documentation or payroll records to calculate the average across contributing employees.
Do you currently claim the Employment Allowance for	To understand how many childcare providers are currently claiming the Employment Allowance.	Whether you claim the Employment Allowance to reduce your National	Ask your payroll administrator

<p>reducing employer National Insurance Contribution costs?</p>	<p>Eligible employers can claim the Employment Allowance, which can reduce your employer National Insurance Contribution costs.</p> <p>The UK Government has published additional guidance on the Employment Allowance for childcare providers.. This includes clarifications on eligibility and how the allowance applies to early years providers. For any further inquiries regarding the guidance, please contact HMRC directly.</p>	<p>Insurance Contribution liabilities.</p> <p>You only have to answer this question if you employ staff to work in your service.</p>	<p>or accountant. This will be visible in HMRC submissions if claimed.</p>
<p>Do you currently pay at least the Real Living Wage to yourself?</p>	<p>Previous evidence, including the 2023 Financial Sustainability Health Check, reported that 72% of childminders across the whole childcare sector are not paying themselves the real Living Wage.</p> <p>The responses to this question will help us to understand the current position.</p>	<p>Information as to whether you are able to pay yourself an average hourly rate that is at least at the same level as the current Real Living Wage rate.</p>	<p>Compare the average hourly rate that you pay yourself with the current Real Living Wage rate (available on the Living Wage Scotland website).</p>
<p>Do you currently pay at least the Real Living Wage to staff in your service?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yes – all staff ○ Yes – only staff delivering funded Early Learning and Childcare ○ No 	<p>Sustainable rates should be set at a level that enables childcare staff delivering funded ELC in private and third sector services to be paid at least the real Living Wage. This also including childminders where workers are regularly employed to provide direct care to children.</p> <p>In line with the requirements for Living Wage accreditation, and as set out in Section 2 of the Funding Follows the Child Operating Guidance, apprentices do not have to receive the real Living Wage. If apprentices in your setting are paid</p>	<p>Whether your service pays the Real Living Wage to all, some, or no staff.</p> <p>You only have to answer this question if you employ staff to work in your service.</p>	<p>Compare your pay rates with the current Real Living Wage rate (available on the Living Wage Scotland website) and</p>

	below the real Living Wage, but all other staff, or all other staff delivering funded ELC, are paid at least the real Living Wage then please select one of the 'Yes' options for this question.		check payroll records.
Do volunteers or unpaid assistants currently carry out any roles to support the running of your setting (e.g. administrative tasks or school pick ups/drop offs)?	Volunteers or unpaid assistants can play key roles in supporting the running of childminding services. For example, if they support you to complete administrative tasks, or assistant with school/nursery picks ups and/or drop offs.	Whether volunteers or unpaid assistants regularly contribute to your operations (e.g., admin, school/nursery drop offs/pick ups).	Consider any volunteers or unpaid assistants involved in supporting the running of your service.
Would you be willing to provide the hourly pay of staff in your service across a range of roles? This information is optional.	To establish whether you would be happy to provide hourly pay for different levels of staff in your service.	Whether you would like to provide more detailed staff cost information.	Discretionary based on your preference.
Average gross hourly pay (before tax, national insurance and other deductions) for assistants.	To understand average rates of pay for assistants in childminding services, which can help with informing analysis of any future policy changes.	Average gross hourly rate for assistants.	Check payslips, payroll software or wage summaries.
Please use the box below to set out average gross hourly pay for any other staff you employ in your service. This could include specialist staff who provide dedicated support for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities; and/or	<p>To allow you to provide additional supporting information, if you wish, regarding gross hourly pay for any other staff roles in your service.</p> <p>To understand pay differentials within services, and across different types of providers, which can help with informing analysis of any future policy changes.</p>	<p>Average gross hourly rate for any additional staff roles in your service that are not assistants.</p> <p>You only have to answer this question if you employ staff to work in your service.</p>	Check payslips, payroll software or wage summaries.

sectorial, maintenance, catering, or domestic staff.			
Would you be willing to provide information on the average hourly rate that you pay yourself? This question is optional.	To establish whether you would be happy to provide information on the average hourly rate that you pay yourself.	The estimated average hourly rate that you are able to pay yourself.	Whether you would like to provide more detailed staff cost information.
What is the average hourly rate that you pay yourself?	To understand the average hourly rates that childminders are able to pay themselves. This can help with informing analysis of any future policy changes.	The estimated average hourly rate that you are able to pay yourself.	

Section 8: Anticipated Future Costs

Question	Why it's being collected	What we are collecting	How/where to find it
Please set out your current expectations with regards to cost pressures for your service over the coming year. For example, you may wish to highlight specific costs that you anticipate will rise by substantial amounts or above inflation?	To identify your current expectations on costs and any outlier expenses that could affect future costs.	Your anticipation of future cost pressures.	Look at upcoming projects or maintenance plans.

Section 9: Additional Comments

Question	Why it's being collected	What we are collecting	How/where to find it
Comments on delivering funded ELC sustainably	<p>Provides qualitative insights to supplement financial data.</p> <p>Please use this question to provide any further additional information that you wish to provide to support your previous answers.</p>	<p>Your perspective or suggestions on funded ELC delivery.</p> <p>Any further information to support your previous answers.</p>	<p>Based on your operational experience.</p>