



Consortium for the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas

Response to: Consultation on Proposals to amend the Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day Care for Children Under Age 12

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**Foyles Women's
Information
Network**

Women's Regional Consortium: Working to Support Women in Rural Communities and Disadvantaged Urban Areas

1. Introduction

1.1 This response has been undertaken collaboratively by the members of the Consortium for the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas (hereafter, either the Women's Regional Consortium or simply the Consortium), which is funded by the Department for Communities and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

1.2 The Women's Regional Consortium consists of seven established women's sector organisations that are committed to working in partnership with each other, government, statutory organisations and women's organisations, centres and groups in disadvantaged and rural areas, to ensure that organisations working for women are given the best possible support in the work they do in tackling disadvantage and social exclusion.¹ The seven groups are as follows:

- ♀ Training for Women Network (TWN) – Project lead
- ♀ Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)
- ♀ Women's Support Network (WSN)
- ♀ Northern Ireland's Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)
- ♀ Women's TEC
- ♀ Women's Centre Derry
- ♀ Foyle Women's Information Network (FWIN)

1.3 The Consortium is the established link and strategic partner between government and statutory agencies and women in disadvantaged and rural areas, including all groups, centres and organisations delivering essential frontline services, advice and

¹ Sections 1.2-1.3 represent the official description of the Consortium's work, as agreed and authored by its seven partner organisation

support. The Consortium ensures that there is a continuous two-way flow of information between government and the sector. It also ensures that organisations/centres and groups are made aware of consultations, government planning and policy implementation. In turn, the Consortium ascertains the views, needs and aspirations of women in disadvantaged and rural areas and takes these views forward to influence policy development and future government planning, which ultimately results in the empowerment of local women in disadvantaged and rurally isolated communities.

1.4 The Women's Regional Consortium appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Department of Health's Consultation on Proposals to amend the Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day Care for Children Under Age 12.

1.5 We wish to endorse the response made by the Women's Policy Group (WPG) of which the Women's Regional Consortium is a member and the response by the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA).

2.0 General Comments

The Women's Regional Consortium would like to raise the importance of and contribution to the wider childcare offering provided through the **Women's Centre Childcare Fund (WCCF)**. This fund enables Women's Centres to provide childcare places that are 100% supported for the most disadvantaged children and families. These sessional places ensure that while their mother/carer avails of services including training and education children have an opportunity to experience a childcare setting, to socialise, interact, play and learn in a supported environment.

For some women (especially ethnic minorities and lone parents) the prospect of increased economic participation, employment and reduction of the adverse effects of poverty can depend on the availability of appropriate integrated childcare and access to education/training opportunities at community level. A lack of appropriate integrated childcare and community education acts as a fundamental barrier to the engagement of socioeconomically disadvantaged women in education and training and in employment. This is the kind of integrated provision that is provided by WCCF and which is so vital to these women.

The Women's Regional Consortium also supports the concerns outlined by the Women's Policy Group which have not been specifically addressed in the consultation:

- **Flexibility in childminding settings must be taken into account.** This is particularly important where a childminder's workplace is also their home and where their own children count towards the maximum number. Many families that need to use childcare settings will often have multiple children they need looked after and would prefer for the children to be looked after together. Flexibility in these circumstances would be very important especially where children leave one age group and enter another.
- **There is no attempt to address accommodations for children with additional needs in this consultation.** It is unclear if the Department intend to carry out further work in this area but this document does not address the needs of children looked after in mainstream childcare facilities that need additional support.

The Women's Regional Consortium have concerns about the rigid nature of the options outlined in the consultation. This follows from our shared concerns with the Women's Policy Group about the need for flexibility. Consultees are asked whether they agree with the Department's preferred option and only given the facility to provide further information if they disagree. However, consultees may agree with the Department's preferred option but would still like to see some flexibilities included where, for example, children are about to leave one age group and enter another.

3.0 Specific Questions

1. Are you responding

☐ as an individual?

☒ on behalf of an organisation?

7. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please provide your name and position, the name and address of the organisation and an email address.

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8. Are you interested in contributing to further Departmental work on the subject matter covered by the consultation?

☒ Yes

☐ No

If you have answered yes, please provide your name and a contact email address:

Siobhán Harding
Email: policy@wsn.org.uk

Key issue 1 - Countersigned Health Assessments

Do you agree with the Department's Assessment of Option 2 as the preferred option?

Yes

If you have answered "No" above, please provide your reasons:

In preparation for this response we consulted with the network of Women's Centres in Northern Ireland who provide a valuable childcare offering for families through the Women's Centre Childcare Fund (WCCF).

Following consultation with the Women's Centres we agree with the Department's Assessment of Option 2 as the preferred option.

However, the Women's Centres have indicated that although not necessary for prospective students and workers who are not proposed to be either a person in charge or an assistant to the person in charge Women's Centres will still require all childcare staff to have a GP signed healthcare self-assessment. Under Option 2 this would not be required before staff, other than those in charge or their deputies, commence work and therefore would not hold up the recruitment process. The Women's Centres have stated that it will still be made clear to all staff that a health declaration countersigned by a GP will still need to be submitted and if anything should come to light then employment would be terminated.

Key issue 2 – Adult to Child Ratios (Childminding) Options for Consideration

Do you agree with the Department's preferred option (option 4)?

No

If you have answered "No" above, please provide your reasons:

In preparation for this response, we consulted with the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) who have consulted with their membership of approximately

600 childminders. The preference among these responses was for Option 6. We therefore support Option 6 as the preferred option.

Key issue 2 – Adult to Child Ratios (Daycare) Options for Consideration

Do you agree with the Department's preferred option (Option 2)?

No

If you have answered “No” above, please provide your reasons:

In preparation for this response we consulted with the network of Women's Centres in Northern Ireland and their preferred option was Option 3.

In choosing Option 3 it was proposed that this gave the Daycare facility the option of one additional child under 2 years old but they would at all times take into account the age, ability and needs of the children. For example, looking after four 12-month-olds may be very different to looking after four 23-month-olds. Assessment of need will also be a factor and this is a judgement that the Women's Centre/Daycare facility will make in terms of both the child(ren) and staff workload and this option gives them the facility to do that.