



Er budd y plant: Cwlwm's calls for a fairer future







Foreword from the five CWLWM CEOs:

Childcare services are essential for Wales' children to have a positive start, playful childhood and for communities to prosper. They provide the vital services for children's development; and play an important role in supporting families across Wales. The businesses, charities, and workforce are focused on providing high-quality childcare experiences for children from birth – 12 years of age.

The Cwlwm manifesto realises this importance in policy terms, creating a vision of long term sustainable childcare provision which will support the next generation of young children in Wales for decades to come.

The early years of life is a crucial time. During this time, young children undergo significant cognitive and physical developmental changes which set the tempo for how we live our lives. The childcare sector is geared to support this development, providing support for all children, regardless of their background. The Cwlwm manifesto realises this importance in policy terms, creating a vision of long term sustainable childcare provision which will support the next generation of young children in Wales for decades to come.



1: Increase pay and targeted financial support for the sector to help with the recruitment, retention of staff

What are the current issues?

- Evidence from the sector tells us that recruitment and retention is challenging. However, this reality has been experienced by the sector for almost two decades.
- Recruitment and retention are challenging because the sector is significantly underfunded, meaning that staff at all levels of the sector do not receive adequate pay for the vital work they do.
- This lack of pay means that, for many practitioners, it is simply not viable to pay everyday bills, with opportunities for career progression limited and other careers entirely separate to care being seen as more lucrative.
- Decline in the number of childminders continues to be a concern and impacts on parental choice of childcare.

What do the stats tell us?

- Over half of the sector (**57%**) say that they have found it difficult to recruit staff for their setting in the last 12 months¹.
- Over half of the sector (**54%**) of the sector say that the main reason for this difficulty in recruitment is because the salary is too low to attract staff².
- In the out of school childcare sector, staff shortages are continuing to undermine the sustainability of settings. In the last 12 months, only **28%** of staff leaving positions have remained within the sector.
- Childminder numbers in Wales continue to decline by over **5%** per year.

How will this call help resolve the issues faced?

- Increasing pay will help make a career more attractive and recompense staff for the time spent planning, responding to various agendas / strategies and delivering for children and their families.
- Continued commitment to fund qualifications and training opportunities and other initiatives to encourage recruitment from outside the sector, helping the sector become more sustainable in the long run.
- There is an inconsistent approach currently to accessing and securing funding for support and training for those looking to become a childminder in Wales given 22 local authority approaches to this. Providing a national programme of support would ensure a consistent, accessible approach that is easier to promote.
- Increased support will enhance access to Welsh-medium provision enabling the sector as a whole to deliver on Welsh-language targets.

1 <https://cwlwm.org.uk/our-work/reports>

2 <https://cwlwm.org.uk/our-work/reports>

2: Consistent and long-term funding to tackle fragmentation and improve sector sustainability

What are the current issues?

- Any sector needs certainty to forward plan. The current funding of the sector seems designed only to paper over the cracks, meaning that many settings work often on a year-by-year basis.
- A long-term funding strategy should eventually be rolled out to incorporate children under the age of two and play opportunities for children up to the age of 12, ensuring that the importance of the first 1,000 days of a child's life is respected and reflected through added value in policy terms.
- We welcomed the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme but recommend that it is **extended to** schools/community buildings used **in part** by childcare. Such childcare providers are unable to access any rate relief when they are not the sole occupants of the property, whose landlords charge a portion of their rates within their overall rent.

What do the stats tell us?

- Cost of living increases, mortgage/rent increases and staffing shortages are impacting on many settings. Increasingly these are leading settings to consider increasing fees (**50%**), closing elements of the service (**10%**), reducing opening times (**17%**), and deregistering (**10%**).
- Only **31%** of settings say that they have 6 months or more of contingency funds / savings in place³.

How will this call help resolve the issues faced?

- Long-term funding will enable settings to better financially support themselves, creating a stronger financial base, and helping to increase salaries in order to recruit and retain staff.
- Setting sustainability is incredibly important for children and their families, especially in rural communities, where access to a wide range of settings is limited. Settings exist at the epicentre of communities, creating an environment where every child, no matter their background, is provided with an equality of support to help them develop to the best of their ability. The long-term survivability of settings is therefore crucial for goals pertaining to equality of opportunity.

3 <https://cwlwm.org.uk/our-work/reports>





3: Enhance the value of the sector

What are the current issues?

- Staff love working with children but because of low pay, as well as a feeling of **“things being done to them”**. Staff do not feel they are valued by the current state of the policy landscape regarding their profession.
- ECPLC is a fantastic policy initiative, but currently, there is a lack of understanding amongst policy makers not related to the early years as well as the wider public about how it is designed to positively impact the developmental outcomes of young children.

What do the stats tell us?

- Many practitioners are on low/National Minimum Wage, with an increasing amount of responsibility driven by legislative and regulatory changes.
- Much of the sector feels underappreciated and undervalued both by Government Policy, as well as society as a whole⁴.

How will this call help resolve the issues faced?

- Raising the value of the sector will help the public understand the importance of childcare and increase awareness of the importance of good quality child developmental opportunities.
- Adding value will help support the sector address issues relating to recruitment and retention.

4 <https://www.earlyyears.wales/en/news/mental-health-and-wellbeing-early-years>





4: Assist the sector to provide increased support for children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

What are the current issues?

- Settings tell us that support is fragmented, inconsistent and that accessing support is labour-intensive and time-consuming.
- Staff also tell us that the system with regards to ALN reporting is fragmented, with a lack of coordination and joined up working with health visitors resulting in many children with ALN not receiving adequate support until they reach school age.

What do the stats tell us?

- Clubs are supporting play and socialisation for an increasing number of children with a variety of wellbeing and support needs. Respondents to the National Club Survey 2024 by Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs had **1,470** children (an increase from **1,249** in 2023) with additional needs in their settings (extrapolated this could be estimated at **4,083** children). This pattern is replicated across the childcare sector.

How will this call help resolve the issues faced?

- Staff need support to be able to provide for the individual needs of children and their families so providing them with the ability to undertake this role with adequate funding and training is crucial.
- Create a better-connected partnership between local authority based Early Years and Health and wellbeing teams in order to increase levels of trust and partnership, meaning that children who require intervention and support in their early years do not fall through the cracks.



5: Social justice and wellbeing

What are the current issues?

- According to a recent report published by the Bevan Foundation in partnership with Barnardo's Cymru which delves into assessing the current state of child poverty in Wales: *"more than half of all children living in poverty in Wales live in a family where there is at least one child aged 0-4"*. This means that the youngest children are unfortunately more likely to experience poverty in their households.
- In families where school-aged children qualify for free school meals, younger siblings accessing non-maintained settings do not benefit from the same support.
- There is a high prevalence of mental health and wellbeing issues faced by children, which is not being supported through interventionist policy making.

What do the stats tell us?

- Settings support children with a range of increasing support/well-being needs: the most common being difficulty managing emotions (**68%** of clubs), speech and language challenges (**63%**), difficulty making new friends/other social skills (**48%**), increasing levels of neurodiversity (**48%**).

How will this call help resolve the issues faced?

- Legislation implemented to address and enhance social justice and wellbeing in the early years will be crucial in ensuring that the development of child born into disadvantage is not adversely impacted.





6: ECPLC as statutory legislation

What are the current issues?

- ECPLC is a vision of care, play and learning for 0–5-year-olds. It is focused on prioritising child development, providing equal opportunities for all and high-quality experiences through play, learning and care. ECPLC is incredibly important because it recognises the fact babies and young children have the fundamental legal right to grow up happy, healthy and in a safe environment. Currently, ECPLC exists only as secondary legislation, meaning it is guidance only.
- Childcare staff in all settings are key to protecting children's right to play, supporting children's psychological, social and cognitive development and on mental health and wellbeing.

What do the stats tell us?

- Recent research from Save the Children found that children's access to play opportunities outside of the home in the daily lives have decreased over the generations. Just **27%** of children said they regularly play outside their homes, compared to **71%** of the baby boomer generation⁵.
- Furthermore, research conducted by Play Wales in 2022 found that only **40%** of under 11s in Wales go out to play or hang out with their friends "most days" in a week⁶.

How will this call help resolve the issues faced?

- Making ECPLC statutory means that every child across Wales will benefit from its intended purpose: access to high quality and regular play opportunities.
- Providing more young children with access to these play opportunities will be pivotal in helping overturn the current trend of decreasing play opportunities for children, helping shape societal understanding about the importance of regular supported play in children's lives.

5 <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/2022/children-today-far-less-likely-to-play-outside-than-their-grandparents>

6 <https://play.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/What-children-say-about-play-in-Wales-2022.pdf>





7: Enhance Cwlwm's ability to implement its Anti-racism work

- Cwlwm partners have worked across the sector alongside partners such as DARPL to learn, to co-develop and to implement anti-racist guidance and Professional Learning for early years providers across the nation.
- Anti-racist leadership learning is incredibly important in ensuring that every child, no matter their background, is provided with equal access to the wealth of benefits high-quality early years practice provides. Looking at early years, childcare and play practice through an anti-racist lens is crucial in helping achieve the Welsh Government's aim of ensuring Wales becomes an anti-racist nation by 2030.
- Increasing funding for Cwlwm to continue within this work and to work towards diversifying our workforce is incredibly important. We would like to see long-term funding guaranteed to ensure increasing amounts of early years professionals are provided with adequate training and sustained high-quality pan-Wales support provided by DARPL and Cwlwm.

