

A career in childcare and early years in Northern Ireland

- . Do you enjoy working with children and young people?
- . Have you lots of energy and commitment?
- . Can you listen, empathise, and support?
- . Are you sensitive, patient and understanding?



**Yes? then
childcare & early
years could be the
career for you!**

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What is Childcare and Early Years?

Childcare and early years workers provide care, education and support for children from a range of backgrounds, usually between 0 and 14 years of age. Workers are involved in planning, supervising and monitoring age appropriate activities for children, helping them to learn and develop a range of skills. They work with parents, nursery and infant teachers, health visitors, social workers and other health care professionals to support the children.

Care can be provided in a variety of settings including nurseries, pre-school facilities, in a person's own home and in crèches. High quality child care can help children achieve their full potential, and can support parents and families. Pre-school provision is very important for young children, providing opportunities for them to socialise and develop valuable skills that they can use when they go to school and throughout their lives.

Why choose Childcare and Early Years?

Childcare and early years work is often demanding, but it is very rewarding. It requires a range of personal qualities such as; an affinity and enthusiasm for working with children, an interest in their development and welfare, creativity and imagination, effective listening, the ability to support children's personal rights, dignity and privacy, patience and a sense of humour, the ability to deal calmly and firmly with difficult behaviour and excellent communication and interpersonal skills. If you have these qualities and want to do something worthwhile, then child care and early years is the career for you.

Working in child care and early years offers the chance to enter a flexible career with a wide range of jobs to choose from. You should be able to find a job that suits your own circumstances, stage of life and work experience. You can work full-time, or part-time to suit your family or other commitments. Whatever area of the workforce you choose, you will be doing a job that makes a difference to the quality of life for children, young people and their families.

Job opportunities in childcare and early years



With a growing number of parents working or in education and almost every three and four year old in Northern Ireland receiving some sort of pre-school education, the demand for high quality child care continues to increase.

Currently there are over 9,000 childcare and early years professionals working in the statutory, voluntary, and private sectors in NI. Almost 60% of the workforce is employed in the voluntary and community sectors.* Working in this sector, therefore, offers the chance to enter a rewarding career with a wide range of placements to choose from as professionals in the child care and early years sector can be employed in settings such as:

- **Day Nurseries/Day Care**
- **Crèches**
- **Nursery School**
- **Pre-school Sessional Care/Play groups**
- **After School Groups/Centres**
- **Childminding/Home Based Care**

Registration, Inspection and Vetting

The child care and early year's workforce is not currently a registered workforce, although all child care facilities are regulated by local social services departments or by the Department of Education and are inspected on a regular basis.

All staff employed to work with children and young people must have their Criminal record checked by Access NI before they start their employment. This is to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children and young people.

* Figures taken from the Sector Skills Agreement, PSS Report—NISCC June 2008 (Stages 1-5)

Childcare Assistant

Nursery Nurse Assistant

Pre-school Assistant

Day Care Assistant

Pre-school Leader

Playgroup/After school Leader

Baby Room Supervisor

Nursery Room Leader

Day Care Worker

Day Care Supervisor/Leader

Registered Child Minder

Play Development Worker

Early Years Specialist

Pre-school/Day Nursery Manager

Owner of Facility/Business

Throughout their career, childcare and early year's workers can continue to undertake work-based vocational and professional qualifications and can go on to do part time or full time degrees. Workers can progress with appropriate training and qualifications to become supervisors, managers or open their own business or become Early Years Specialists.

Read on to find out more about working in childcare and early years, the experience and qualifications required and the opportunities for career development.

Working in a day care nursery or crèche



Day nurseries and crèches provide care for very young babies and toddlers, usually up to school starting age. They provide care, play and educational opportunities for children. These are usually privately owned, but can be community run or provided by an employer and operate on a fee paying basis.

Day care nurseries provide reliable child-care for working parents as they are normally open all year round with the exception of major holidays and can provide care on a full time or part time basis. Some nurseries also offer funded pre-school places as part of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEP) and after-school services, with older children being collected from school and supervised until the parents finish work or training.

Crèches can operate all day providing flexible short-term care for children for up to 4 hours at any one time. This can be for children whose parents or carers are occupied in some limited activity such as shopping, leisure or education. Children are usually under compulsory school age. Staff must have appropriate early years qualifications and the same staff ratios apply as for a day nursery.

There are standards laid down for providing care in all early years settings. Teams of workers are responsible for looking after children in their care, providing opportunities for them to learn and make friends in a safe environment. Each child would have a key worker allocated to look after their particular needs.

Crèches and Day Nurseries must be registered and inspected by Social Services and where they offer PSEP places they must also be inspected by the Department of Education.



Working in a pre-school / play group

Pre-school /play groups offer sessional care to children aged three to compulsory school age. In exceptional cases some may take children from 2 ½ years of age. The care provided is defined by its duration i.e. usually no longer than 4 hours either in a morning or afternoon session. Many groups operate under the Pre School Expansion programme (PSEP) providing funded places, to which children in their final pre-school year can apply. Play / pre-school groups usually operate during school term only.

Pre-school / play groups provide an opportunity for children of a similar age group to meet and access a wide range of activities, equipment and play materials. There are opportunities to acquire and develop skills by learning through play.

Children are looked after by qualified and trained early year's professionals. These groups must be registered and inspected by Social Services and the Department of Education (where they offer PSEP places) and have adequate staff to child ratios.

Specialist Play workers

Play workers work with school aged children in out of school settings such as; after school clubs, community based play centres and summer schemes. Play workers offer a range of activities and provide children with a safe place to play, socialise, try out new things or just spend quiet time. Play helps children develop in many ways, and a play worker might find themselves involved in creative activities, sporty games, drama, den building, cooking and talking to a child about their worries all in the same day.

For more information about working as a play worker you can contact the Training Co-ordinator in you local Childcare Partnership (See page 13 for details) or **Skills Active, the Sector Skills Council for the Active Leisure and Learning Sector** at

Website: www.skillsactive.com

Telephone: 028 9756 002

Working as a registered childminder



Registered childminding is care provided by a registered childminder who looks after children aged between 0 -14 years in the childminder's own home. Childminders are self employed carers who negotiate fees and terms of conditions of their service directly with the children's parents.

Childminders hold a very responsible job, often working long hours on their own to provide parents with flexible and quality child care. This care supports the effective learning of children by providing opportunities for individual attention as well as the rich learning environment of the home and local community.

Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA)

Childminders represent the most popular form of day care for working parents, providing 76% of full day care provision in Northern Ireland, with more than 22,000 places for pre-school and after school children.

In Northern Ireland, there are 3,800 registered childminders. Approximately 60% of registered childminders are members of the **Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA)** who offer support, advice and training opportunities to registered childminders.

See page 12 for contact details for the NICMA.

Figures taken from Sector Skills Agreement Child Care and Early Years—NISCC June 2008 (Stages 1-5)

Training

While there are no mandatory requirements for registered childminders in Northern Ireland to undertake any formal training, childminders are encouraged and supported by the NICMA to undertake training. The NICMA provides training in a range of areas such as:

- Child protection,
- Managing children's behaviour,
- Health and Safety,
- Child development
- Providing suitable activities for children of different ages groups

Registration

In Northern Ireland, a childminder must be registered with Social Services if they are to look after children to whom they are not related for more than 2 hours per day, for reward. Annual inspections are carried out by Social Services on both the home and childminder. This is to ensure that the childminder is suitable to care for babies and young children, has adequate insurance cover and appropriate safety equipment in their home. In addition, all adults living in the childminder's home must undergo a criminal records check.



Childminders can be registered to care for up to 6 children under 12 years of age, but of these, no more than 3 children can be under 5 years of age. This includes the childminders own children. This care can include pre-school and school age children. It can be on a part time or full time basis from the age of a few months throughout the child's pre-school, nursery and school years usually up to the age of 14 years.

Getting started

To become a register childminder, you should contact the **NICMA** for an information pack and your local **Early Years Teams**.

Early Years Teams are specialist teams of social workers within the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT) who are responsible for the registration, inspection, monitoring and support of childminders and day care providers.

Getting started in child care and early years

There are many opportunities within this sector, and different options for entry into a career working with children. Individuals entering the sector normally fit into one of the following categories: School leavers, volunteers, those returning to work or changing their career.

Experience

If you are considering a career in child care and early years, obtaining experience of working with children would be a good place to start. This would enhance your prospects and provide an opportunity to find out if working with children would be the career for you. Having a clear understanding of what the work would entail, that you could be working with young children for full day periods, in noisy environments, and handling complex issues would be an advantage. Also you would need to be in good health and fit as this work often involves being mobile, lifting and other physical activities. See the NISCC **Social Care Contacts** for more details of relevant organisations offering paid and unpaid opportunities.

Relevant Qualifications



An average of 60% of childcare workers – with the exception of child minders – hold a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 qualification, while 30% do not yet have a relevant childcare related qualification.

While many staff are not qualified, they are encouraged to get relevant child care qualifications and most childcare and early years staff will also undertake in house child care specific or statutory training which includes: courses on child protection, first aid or food hygiene for example.

There is currently no requirement for childminders to hold any qualifications, but they are also encouraged to update their skills and training in areas such as Child Protection, First Aid and Child Development.

The current recognised professional qualifications are NVQs at the appropriate level required to do that specific job role or equivalent. For those staff employed in pre-school education programmes, the minimum entry qualification is currently set at NVQ Level 2 and 3.

Child care and early years staff are encouraged to regularly update their skills and learning as part of continuing professional development and over the coming years the minimum entry requirement for early years is expected to rise to a level 3 qualification.

People who are also qualified in play work at the appropriate level can work in this sector.

- **NVQ 's Children's Care, Learning and Development**
- **NVQ' s Play work (Contact SkillsActive for more information about working in playwork. See page 12 for contact details)**

Apprenticeships NI

Apprenticeships are available in Early Years Care and Education.

The NI Apprenticeships Programmes, which is funded by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), now supports entry for candidates of all ages. The programme is supported by frameworks developed by sector skills councils and is delivered by training providers across NI under contract to DEL (NI). Potential apprentices must be in paid employment and supported by their employers in order to apply. Successful completion leads to achievement of NVQs at levels 2 and 3.

More information for employers and potential apprenticeships is available from DEL (NI) at

Website: www.delni.gov.uk

or call 0800 0845 573

(Monday—Friday 9.00 am to 5.00 p,m)



Further advice about qualifications and training

The Early Years Organisation

The Early Years organisation provides information on a range of programmes and services for Playgroups and Daycare staff, parents and those working with children.

For more information about their services and training, you can log onto their website at **www.early-years.org** or by telephoning them at: **028 9066 2825**.

NICMA—The Childminding Association

For more information about becoming a registered childminder, you can contact the NICMA. This organisation provides information and training on how to become a quality home based childcare and education service.

You can find out more about the NICMA at their website: **www.nicma.org** or by telephoning them at **028 9181 1015**

Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA)

If you are an adult intending to return to education and seeking advice on what to do next, you can contact your local EGSA office.

EGSA staff are employed in eight offices across Northern Ireland and staff are available to answer questions you may have about adult learning opportunities, such as qualifications, awarding bodies, funding, distance learning opportunities and finding a course.

Contact details are as follows:

Tel: 028 9024 4274 or

Email: info@egsa.org.uk or



Northern Ireland Child Care Partnerships

There are four Childcare Partnerships in Northern Ireland. Their role is to ensure there is high quality, affordable childcare available for children up to the age of 14 years. As part of this remit, the partnerships analyse training needs of the early years sector, maintain a database of qualifications (Training Directory) held by childcare workers, promote quality assurance and provide information and advice to anyone wanting to work or train as a childcare or early years worker.

The Training Directory is designed to help you to access the information and guidance you may require to decide if a career in childcare is for you and to help those in the childcare field advance their careers.

For more information, you can contact the Child Care Partnerships at

www.northernchildcare.com

www.easternchildcarepartnership.org.uk

www.southernchildcarepartnership.ni.org

www.childcare-west.org

Other Useful Websites

Child Care Choices: www.childcarechoices.n-i.nhs.uk

This site provides information to those interested in a career in childcare or those already working in childcare who want more information on training and development support.

Contacting the Early Years Teams

Early Years Teams are specialist teams of social workers within Health and Social Care Trusts who are responsible for the registration, inspection, monitoring and support of childminders and day care providers. Contact details for these can also be found on the Child Care Choices website as follows:

www.childcarechoices.n-i.nhs.uk/index.html

Careers Services for NI:



If you are still at school, and are interested in a career in childcare and early years, talk to your school careers teacher.

Alternatively you can contact your local careers service office, located at your nearest Jobs & Benefits Offices for careers advice.

Go to **www.delni.gov.uk** and click on “***How can we help?***” to locate contact details of your nearest careers service office.

Contact details are also available in the NISCC **Social Care Contacts** booklet.

Colleges of Further & Higher Education (F&HE)

For more information about childcare and early years courses, contact your local college.

All the colleges have a career guidance or information service to help you find the right course. Most colleges also hold information days where potential students can obtain information and advice on all full and part-time courses offered and get the opportunity to speak to tutors and careers staff.



If you log on to the Department of Employment and Learning website as follows:

<http://www.delni.gov.uk>

and follow the links to *Further and Higher education*, you can find online information about your nearest college, the courses on offer and funding for study.

Contact details are also available in the NISCC **Social Care Contacts**

Finding a job

Vacancies are normally advertised in the main newspapers such as:

- **the Belfast Telegraph (Tuesday/Friday)**
- **the Irish News (Thursday)**
- **the Newsletter (Thursday)**

You can also search online for vacancies at the following websites:

Belfast Telegraph: **www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk**

Northern Ireland Jobs: **www.nijobs.com**

Vacancies can be found by searching your weekly newspapers, or by going to your job centre.

Vacancies placed at the jobcentres can be accessed online through the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) website as follows:

www.jobcentreonline.com

You can also contact your local child care provider directly to enquire about job opportunities.

Contact details for the child care and early years providers, voluntary, community agencies specialising in early years can be found in your local telephone directory or by logging on to the online yellow pages service at

www.yell.co.uk



Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) - What we do?

“There is clear evidence, that good quality, appropriate care in their earliest years has long term benefits for children’s physical, social and intellectual development.”

Children First: The NI Childcare Strategy (1999)

NISCC— as Sector Skills Council

NISCC is a partner in Skills for Care and Development (SfC&D), the Sector Skills Council responsible for social care and children’s services throughout the UK. Sector Skills Councils are independent, UK-wide organisations made up from each of the UK member countries and licensed by the Department of Education & Skills to support training and development of the workforce.

NISCC—as Regulator

NISCC is the regulatory body for the social care workforce. The child-care and early years workforce is not currently a registered workforce, although there are regulations and guidance in place concerning staff ratios and other aspects of good practice and all child care facilities are regulated and inspected by Social Services or the Department of Education on a regular basis.

NISCC— as Information Service

The NISCC Information Service promotes social care, social work and child care and early years careers to the general public, careers advisory staff, education providers, employers and our stakeholders. As part of this work, we produce a range of information publications which are available from the NISCC website at **www.niscc.info** or by emailing **info@nisocialcarecouncil.org.uk**

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