

Fostering the future

Paper 2

Recruiting and retaining more foster carers

Matthew Oakley

SMF

**Social Market
Foundation**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the second in a series of reports that looks at how to improve the system of foster care in England. The need to do so is clear. Around three-quarters of all looked after children in England rely on foster care and, while typically better than if they had not been taken into care, children experiencing the system have significantly poorer outcomes than their peers without care experience. With this in mind, it is welcome that the Government has launched an independent review of Children’s Social Care and, as the country looks to build back better following the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital that this review leads to action that improves outcomes for this vulnerable group.

The first report in this series highlighted that across the country, local authorities are not meeting their statutory duties to provide and plan for foster care placements that meet the needs of children requiring foster care. Tackling this will require recruiting and retaining more foster carers and ensuring that the skills, experience and qualities of those foster carers combine to meet the needs of children who are fostered. To support that, this report looks at what we know about foster carer recruitment and retention and asks what needs to change to ensure that more foster carers are recruited and retained.

Do we need more foster carers?

The crisis has been felt sharply across children’s social care: while referrals have fallen during school closures, wider evidence points to increasing pressures, further straining budgets and new and deeper challenges. However, full evidence and data covering the impacts of the last year will take time to surface. As such, our focus on the situation pre-pandemic.

In this context, the starting point is understanding the scale of the challenge ahead. This comes from three main sources:

1. **An increasing number of children are requiring foster care.** Based on an average of 2.9% year on year growth seen in the last five years, the number of children requiring foster care could rise by 33% by 2030;
2. Even without this growth, **the current number and diversity of foster care placements is insufficient to meet the needs of existing children requiring foster care.** The range and complexity of needs is also growing; and
3. Poor retention of foster carers means that around 20% of fostering households leave the system each year, meaning that **local authorities and Independent Fostering Providers need to recruit significant numbers of new families each year just to maintain capacity.**

This report projects that these three challenges mean that more than 63,000 new foster care families will need to be recruited over the next five years to replace those leaving the system and create the capacity needed to meet the needs of children requiring foster care. Current trends would deliver fewer than 40,000 new families, meaning a deficit in recruitment of around 25,000 foster care families. This means that much more needs to be done to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Stemming the flow

Given the very high turnover of foster carers, and the significant loss of experience, skills and expertise that this represents, an obvious question is why so many foster carers are leaving the system. Existing evidence shows that, while fostering can be an incredibly rewarding role, it can also be stressful and challenging.¹

As a result, three in ten deregistrations (29%) currently take place within the first two years of fostering and two thirds of deregistrations (66%) are initiated by the foster carer.

To understand in more depth some of the reasons why foster carers deregister, we undertook polling with people who stopped providing foster care placements and asked about the reasons behind this.² The polling surveyed 1,932 UK adults (18+) prior to the pandemic, including 180 foster carers and 111 people who were previously foster carers. Overall, it shows that there are a wide range of reasons that contribute to foster carers deregistering and that these also vary significantly by groups of different ages. They included:

- **Receiving too little training or support** - one in three of those aged between 18 and 54 said that this contributed to them no longer fostering.
- **Not receiving enough respite** - nearly three in ten of those aged 35-54 (30%) cited this as a reason (and 14% for all age groups).
- **Not being able to afford it** - one in five (20%) of those aged 35-54 cited this reason.
- **Not receiving enough placements** - one in five (20%) of previous foster carers cited this as a reason.
- **Being unable to meet the child's needs** - was cited by one in five of 18-34s (20%).

These all chime with existing evidence, which highlights that foster carers feel undervalued, have challenges with affordability and are dissatisfied with access to respite, holidays, support and training.

How to attract more people (back) to fostering

The starting point for recruiting people to become foster carers is for them to be attracted to the prospect of fostering. Our polling shows that significant numbers of people have previously considered or are currently considering fostering. Overall, 17% of respondents had considered fostering. The proportion varies significantly by age group, with one in four (26%) of those aged between 18 and 34 having considered fostering at some point, compared to one in ten of those aged 55 and over.

The polling also reveals that 6% of those aged 18-34 are currently considering fostering, meaning that 300,000 people in this age group are currently considering fostering. Given the fact that nine in ten (88%) current foster carers are aged over 40, this represents an untapped source of foster carers.

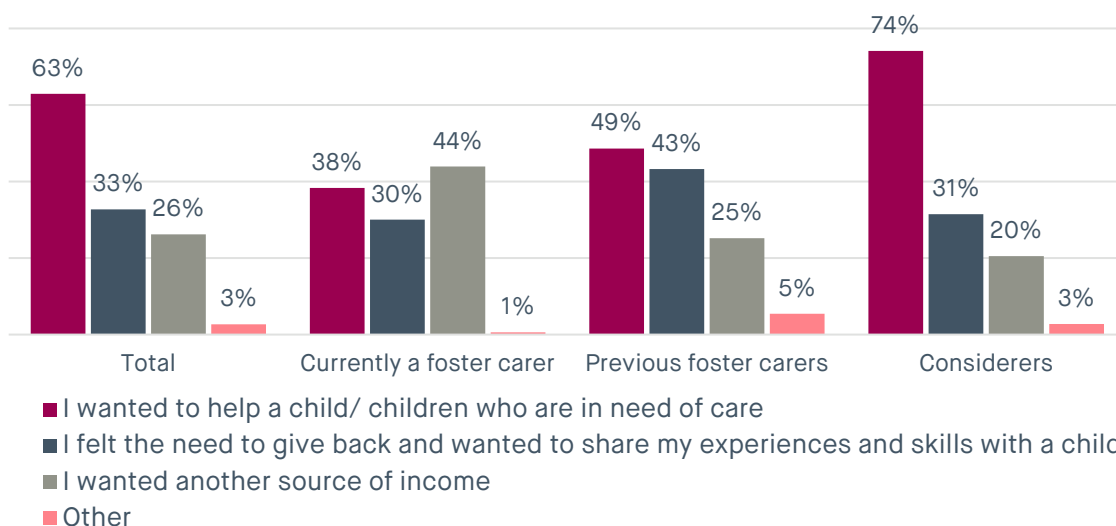
Despite many people having an interest in fostering and having seen information about opportunities to become a foster carer, the challenge is that relatively small numbers of those saying they have an interest in fostering actually formally enquire about opportunities. Fewer still actually end up applying.

For example, in 2019/20, there were more than 135,000 initial enquiries in England, but fewer than 9,000 applications, meaning that the conversion rate is around 7%. And, although the number of enquiries increased over the last five years of data, there was a 31% **fall** in number of applications to become a foster carer over the same period. Overall, the proportion of those enquiring about fostering who actually end up applying has fallen over time.

This means that recruitment practices will need to improve significantly if enough foster carers are going to be recruited. This needs to be informed by a clear understanding of the motivations of different groups of prospective foster carers and the reasons why they do not take their interest forward.

Polling for this report provides insights into each of these. The findings show that prospective carers have different attitudes and motivations to existing and previous carers, and that these also vary by age. For example, the chart below shows that, for current foster carers, factors were fairly evenly split between child-focussed factors (helping a child or sharing experiences and skills) and the desire to have another source of income. This contrasts with those who are or have considered fostering, where helping children was by far the most commonly reported factor (with 74% of the group suggesting it).

Factors contributing to decision to foster / consider fostering



Source: *Opinium on behalf of SMF*

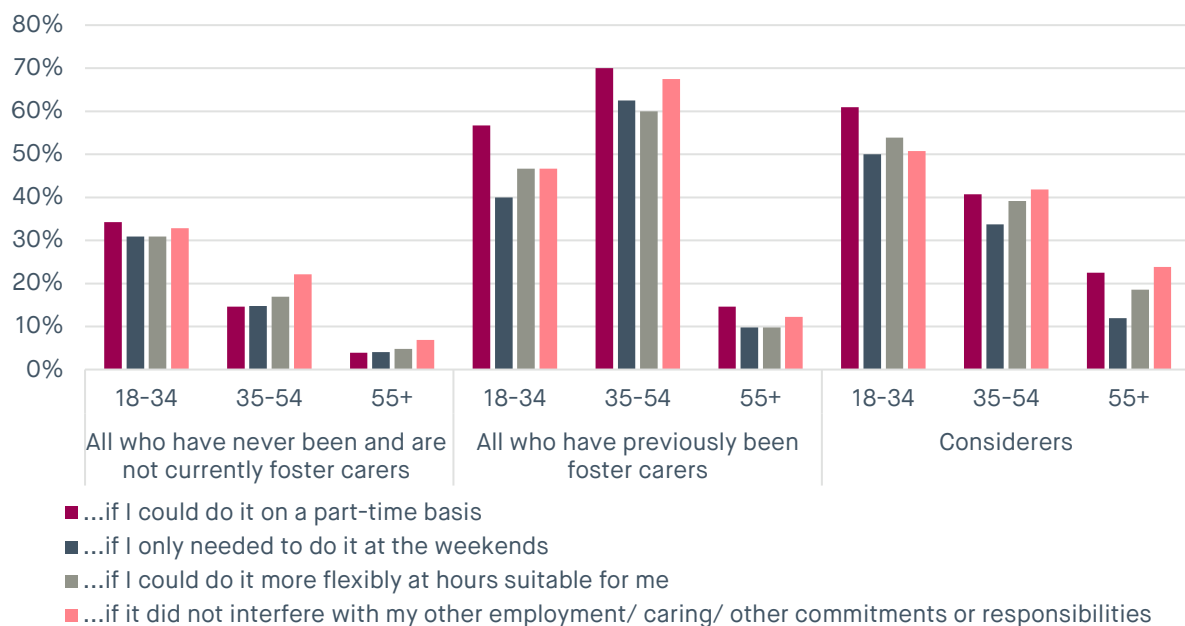
Understanding these differences in motivations between those considering fostering and those already fostering, and between different age groups is vital if we are going to recruit more people to become foster carers. In turn, it is important to understand the barriers that exist which meant that many of those who consider fostering do not take their interest forward. Doing so shows that there are a set of key issues, including:

- **Not having enough time**, with one in four considerers (18%) citing this as a reason for not going ahead with fostering.
- **Not being able to afford fostering**, with 15% of considerers, and 35% of 18–34-year-olds citing this as a reason.
- **Not being able to meet the needs of foster children**, with 14% of considerers citing this as a reason.

With these issues in mind, our polling also considered aspects of foster carer conditions and flexibility that would make it more likely for those considering foster care to take their interest forward. For example:

- Seven in ten (70%) previous foster carers aged between 35 and 54 would be more likely to consider fostering again if they could do it on a part-time basis. More than six in ten of this same group would be more inclined to consider fostering again if they could do it at the weekends (63%), more flexibly (60%) or in a way that did not interfere with their other employment/caring commitments (68%).
- Considerers aged between 18 and 34 also respond strongly to the potential of increased flexibility. Six in ten (61%) of this group would be more likely to consider fostering if they could do it part time. And around half would be more likely to consider it with the other forms of flexibility.
- More than seven in ten of those aged 35-54, who had previously been foster carers said that they would be more likely to foster again if the money received would cover the costs of caring for the child (78%) and if it reflected their skills and experience (75%). A similar proportion (73%) said they would be more likely to consider fostering again if they were given rights to take holiday.

Factors of flexibility that increase the likelihood of different groups considering fostering (for the first time, or again)



Source: *Opinium on behalf of SMF*

What can be done about it?

Meeting the growing needs of children requiring foster care will require us to both improve the retention of current foster carers and attract more people to become foster carers and return to fostering if they have already left.

This report shows that by understanding the motivations of prospective carers, and assessing why previous carers have left the system, action can be taken to make this possible. Recommendations based on findings from this research are highlighted below.

Recommendation one – A Foster Carers' Charter

The charter should include specific and measurable commitments, with nationally agreed minimum standards, that can be tailored to specific situations of the placement in questions, so that carers are very clear about their rights and responsibilities. The Fostering Network have developed a charter that offers a helpful starting point. We think the current version could go further, for example by being more specific about the decisions that foster carers can and cannot make independently.

Within this, there are a number of areas where national minimum standards should focus for the Foster Carers' Charter. These include access to respite, appropriate pay and adequate training.

Recommendation two – A right to access respite care, training and support

Foster carers should be provided nationally agreed minimum standards for access to respite, both whilst they have a child placed with them and between placements. This will require recruiting more places that are specifically targeted as short-term (potentially weekend) care, which has the added potential to attract more prospective carers to the system. It will also require providing foster carers the financial support they may need to take respite between placements (see below).

All foster carers should also have access to training to ensure they have the skills needed to give the best possible care to children. They should also be encouraged to develop and widen their skills, so they are able to manage a greater range of children's needs. We agree with the Education Select Committee's recommendation that the Government should work with foster carers, experts and third sector organisations to design training resources and make them available nationally. We also believe that the charter should require that all foster carers have a development plan to ensure they are aware of and addressing their development needs.

Recommendation three – Consider foster carer pay

Our research highlighted a number of issues around foster carer pay, which force people to deregister or drop interest in fostering. Tackling these issues will be central to attracting and retaining foster carers, but we recognise that pay is the subject of significant debate. The range of possible options should be explored in more detail by the Review of Children’s Social Care, or a separate review commissioned by it.

We believe that the most promising is to pay carers a baseline “retainer” irrespective of whether they have a child in their care. This would mean that carers receive a payment for being “on the books” and this is supplemented with an additional fee and allowance (to reflect the extra costs of having the child placed with them) when a child is placed with them. Applied across the whole foster care system, this would likely have significant implications both for the legal status of foster carers (i.e. as workers or employees) and for the overall costs of the system. However, given the clear message from our research that affordability is putting people off fostering and leading to existing foster carers leaving the system, we believe that this is a price worth paying to get the quality and consistency of support needed for some of the most vulnerable children in society.

Recommendation four – Increasing the recruitment of flexible foster carers

One of the biggest things that puts many prospective carers off is the lack of flexibility in the current system of fostering. This means that increasing flexibility could attract a large number of people to become foster carers. This is particularly true of younger adults (aged under 34), where half or more of those already considering fostering would be attracted to it if they could do it part time, or only at the weekends. This approach would also likely prove attractive to people who do not want to give up work to foster.

To tap into this interest, new weekend or part-time fostering roles should be created and recruited for. Doing so would also work with recommendations above to guarantee full-time carers respite and improve support. There are a range of ways in which this could work and we believe that the Care Review should consider this issue in detail and make recommendations for how this approach could be taken forward.

Recommendation five – A nationally-coordinated recruitment drive

The recommendations above could go a long way towards making the foster care system more attractive to prospective carers and ensuring that existing carers have the support and conditions needed for them to want to stay in the system.

However, it is not enough to make the system better. People also need to know about the challenges and the opportunities that exist within the foster care system. We believe that the Government should work with the fostering sector to develop a nationally-coordinated recruitment campaign. This would ensure consistency of messaging and national reach, and could deliver significant economies of scale compared to local authorities and IFPs having to develop and implement a significant increase in their own advertising activity. Given the diversity of attitudes and motivations of different groups with an interest in fostering, this campaign needs to be both well-targeted and delivered through a range of different channels.

Conclusion

There are not enough foster carers with the right skills, experience and qualities to meet the needs of children requiring foster care. This can and has to change. We have outlined five recommendations, which will require close consideration and joint working between central and local government, Ofsted and IFPs. We believe that, if taken forward, these approaches could contribute to a significant improvement in the extent to which the foster care system can meet children's needs and, in turn, outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children in our society.

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

“One of the biggest, if not the biggest, issue in fostering is how to secure the future recruitment and retention of enough, high-quality foster carers.”

*Department for Education*³

This is the second report in a series that looks at how the foster care system in England needs to improve to ensure that, as the country looks the build back better following the COVID-19 pandemic, outcomes for this vulnerable and left-behind group improve in the future.

The first report focussed on the extent to which local authorities currently meet their statutory sufficiency duties. These duties require they assess and understand the current and future needs of children coming into care, and to plan, recruit and commission placements that meet these needs. While there is currently no publicly available information on the extent to which these duties are met, the report used a wide range of evidence to show that there is likely a systemic failure of local authorities to meet them.

The report did not lay the blame directly at the door of local authorities. They are working within increasingly tight budgets and having to support a growing number of children in care, who have an increasingly complex range of needs. People working within the system are also committed to supporting and caring for children and young people, and improving outcomes. However, something needs to change. To deliver this change, the report made recommendations in five areas:

- 1. Creating measures of effective capacity and conducting a nationally coordinated needs assessment.** Led by the Department for Education, this would allow for consistent measurement of effective capacity and use this to provide a headline assessment of both the extent to which needs are currently being met and where gaps currently exist.
- 2. Increasing capacity, with a specific focus on flexible care.** We highlighted that the review would likely conclude that there is a systemic under-provision of placements in the current foster care system. As such, we expect that a significant recruitment exercise will be needed to increase effective capacity, particularly for flexible care.
- 3. Providing local authorities with more support to meet their duties and improving accountability.** This is a complex area and we argued that central government should give local authorities more support to meet their duties, include more prescriptive guidance on the data that local authorities should collect and minimum standards for needs assessments. We also recommended that DfE develops a flexible demand projection tool that can be used by local authorities who do not currently have their own resource for this.
- 4. Developing a national register of foster carers.** Collecting more data on foster carers opens up the potential to create a national register. This could be used to improve recruitment and act as a vacancy management system to help

improve matching. It would also provide a necessary staging point for a potential move to regional commissioning (see below). Alongside defined training standards, this would enable foster carers to move between fostering service providers.

- 5. Adopting regional commissioning.** Regional bodies that plan, recruit and commission strategically are more likely to be able to meet the diverse range of children within specific local authorities across the region. They would also be able to shape and manage the commissioning market more effectively.

Given the focus of the first report on increasing effective supply, this report asks what it would take to increase recruitment and improve the retention of foster carers with the skills, expertise and personal qualities needed to meet the needs of children requiring foster care.

Given the paucity of publicly available data on these issues, the report is based on original research with foster carers themselves, foster carers who no longer foster and people who have considered becoming foster carers. The research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, based on polling with these groups (alongside nationally representative polling), a focus group and a series of interviews with foster carers. The report uses insights drawn from this data to make recommendations that could improve the system and contribute to improving outcomes for the children within it.

CHAPTER TWO - DO WE NEED MORE FOSTER CARERS?

At the end of March 2020, there were around 73,300 approved foster carers, providing close to 90,000 approved fostering places. At the same date, there were 57,380 children in foster care.⁴ On the face of this data, the number of foster care places appears to be more than sufficient to meet the needs of children requiring foster care. However, the first report in this series argued that this was not the case in practice. In fact, it showed that across the country there is a significant deficit of what we described as effective capacity. In simple terms this means that there are not enough foster care placements, with foster carers with the requisite training, skills and characteristics, to meet the needs of all the children that are likely to enter the foster care system each year.

A straightforward example of this is the fact that one in eight (13%) children needing foster care as part of a sibling group are not placed according to the plan to place them together. In some parts of the country this figure rises to as high as one in five (20%). However, the issue goes much deeper than this, with local authorities across the country failing to meet the sufficiency duties which legally require them to plan for and provide foster care placements to meet the needs of children requiring fostering both now and in the future.

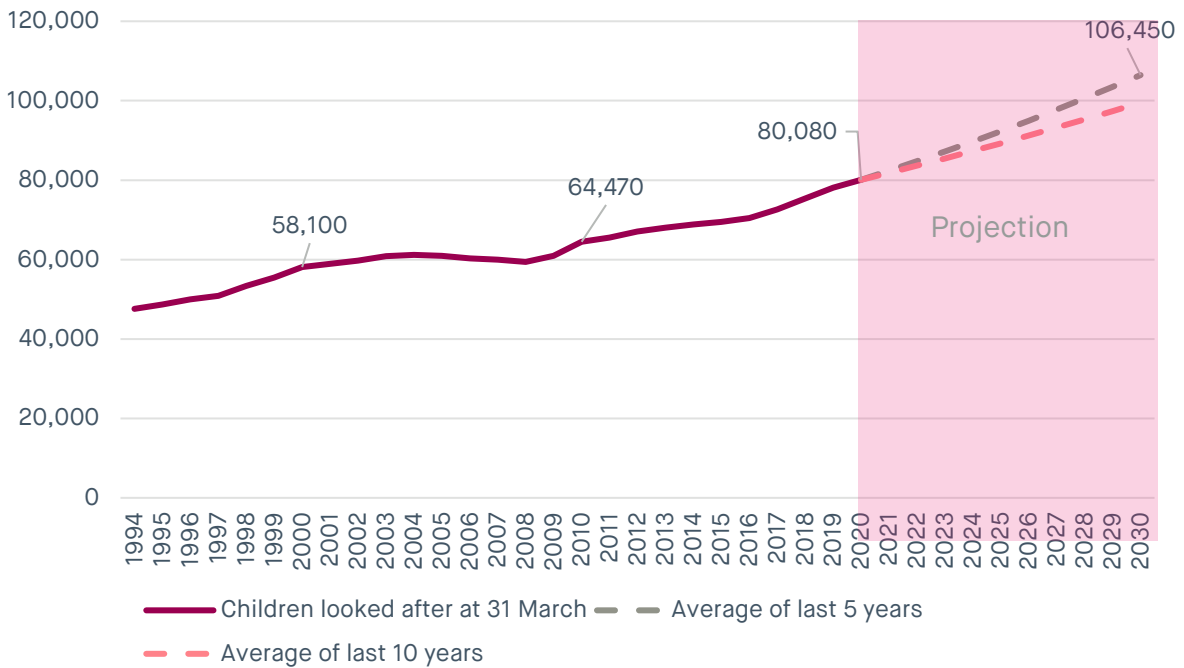
A challenge that is growing

This challenge is compounded by the fact that the number of looked after children and, by implication, the number of children requiring foster care is rising. Figure 1 provides projections for the number of looked after children based on growth in line with two scenarios: that seen in the last five years and that seen in the last ten years.

It shows that, if the number of children looked after rises by the average growth seen in the last five years, there would be 106,450 looked after children by 2030; a 33% growth compared to the figures from 2020.

Looking specifically at what this might mean for the number of children needing foster care, assuming the overall proportion of looked after children who are placed in foster care remains broadly level over time, this would suggest that close to 77,000 children would be in foster care by 2030.

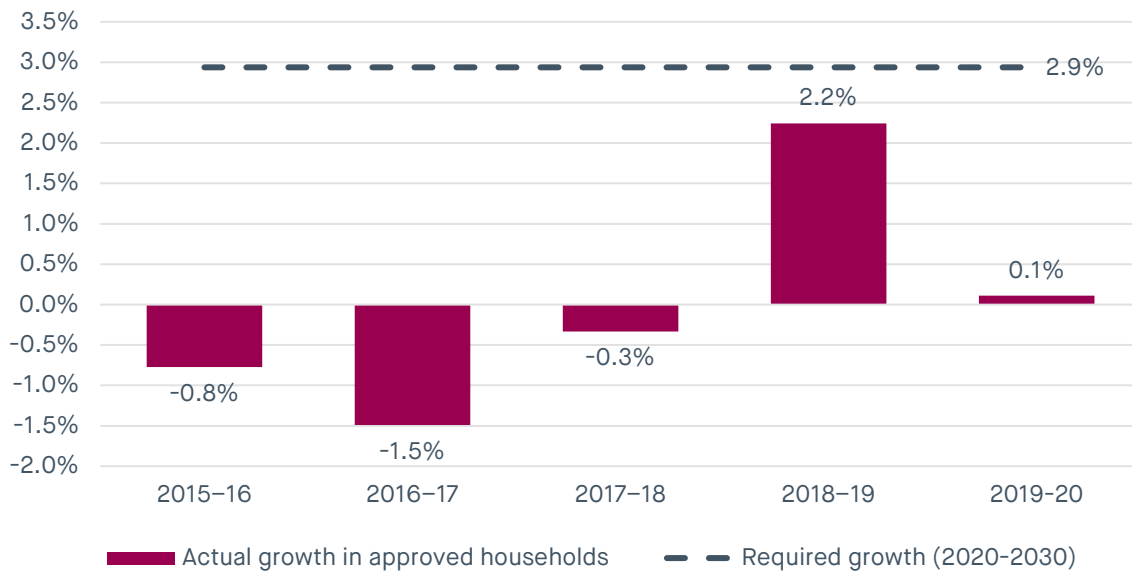
Figure 1: Number of looked after children at 31st March 1994 – 2020, and projection to 2030



Source: Ofsted, SMF projection

Assuming that the current number of foster carers is sufficient, and that increasing demand is not accommodated by continually approving foster care families to have a larger number of placements, meeting this increased number of children requiring foster care in 2030 would mean the number of fostering families increasing by 2.9% a year until then. Figure 2 demonstrates that, in all of the last five years, growth in the number of approved foster care families was significantly lower than that level.

Figure 2: Growth in foster care families 2015-2020, and that required to meet potential demand in 2030



Source: Ofsted, SMF projection

A challenge that is deepening

Once we consider the needs of children in foster care, the issue becomes even more stark. As already highlighted, even if the overall number of places might meet current demand, the characteristics and nature of these places certainly does not.

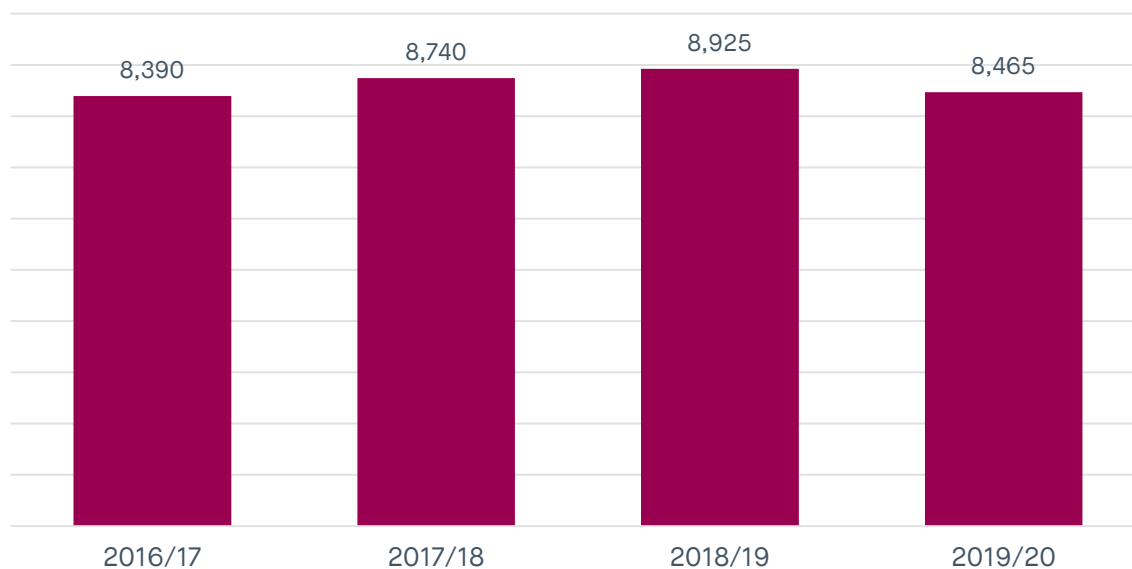
Again, this is a situation that is likely to get worse over time, with evidence pointing to the fact that the range and complexity of needs of looked after children is increasing over time. This means that as well as increasing the overall number of foster care places to meet rising demand, the variety of placements and associated foster carer skills and competencies is also likely to rise. One estimate of the current scale of the challenge here suggests that, to meet even current demand, would mean recruiting 5,900 more foster families in England.⁵

Running to stand still

It is not just the increasing number and complexity of needs of children requiring foster care that is presenting a significant recruitment challenge. In fact, one of the largest problems is the fact that so many foster carers leave the system each year (deregister) that local authorities and IFPs have to recruit significant numbers of new carers each year just to maintain the overall number of placements.

Figure 3 shows that the total number of fostering households that deregistered between in the year to the end of March 2020 was 8,465.

Figure 3: Number of households de-registering for foster care



Source: Ofsted

Overall, this signals a significant level of churn within foster carers in England. In each of the last five years, around one in five (20%) households providing foster care have deregistered. It means that, as well as recruiting to meet the increasing numbers and deepening needs of new foster children, providers need to re-recruit 20% of carers simply to maintain capacity.

How many more foster carers do we need?

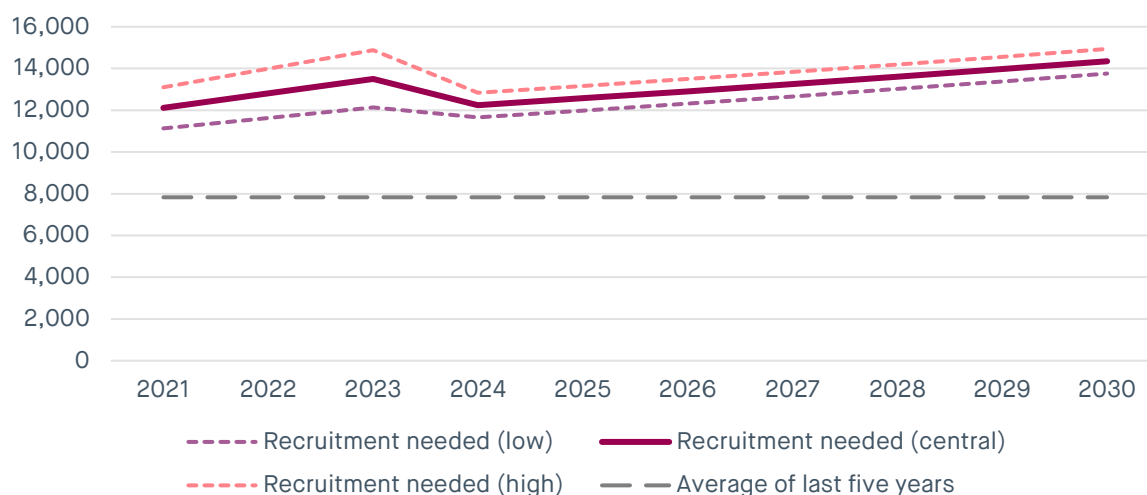
Overall, this means that there are three forces driving the need to recruit more foster carers:

1. Increasing numbers of children requiring foster care;
2. The fact that the current number and diversity of foster carers is insufficient to meet the needs of existing children requiring foster care, and these needs are also growing; and
3. Poor retention means that many foster carers need to be recruited each year just to replace those leaving the system.

Together, this means that a very large number of foster carers need to be recruited over the next decade. Figure 4 provides a projection of the numbers potentially required, assuming that:

- The number of foster care placements needs to rise by 2.9% a year to meet the increasing number of children requiring fostering.
- Deregistrations continue to run at around 20% of total fostering households each year.
- The extent of deficit in effective capacity across the system (i.e. the extent to which capacity would need to be increased to meet needs today) runs at around that evidenced by the lack of capacity for sibling groups (central case of 13%).
- The low case represents half of that assumption of lack of capacity (6.5%) and the high case 50% above the central assumption (19.5%).

Figure 4: Number of foster care families needing to be recruited to meet needs



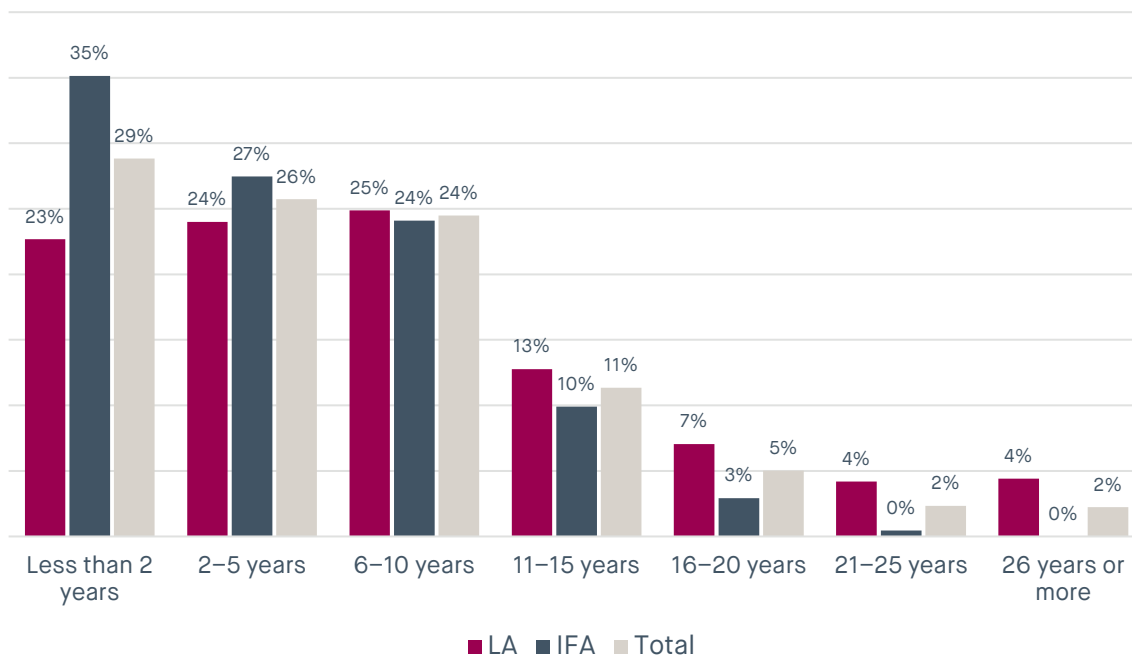
Source: SMF analysis of Ofsted, Fostering Network

Overall, it suggests that over the next five years, local authorities and IFPs will need to recruit just over 63,000 new foster care families. With new approvals averaging at less than 8,000 a year over the last five years, this requirement to recruit more than 10,000 new families a year is clearly a significant challenge. It will require action to improve both retention and recruitment.

CHAPTER THREE - RETENTION: HOW TO STEM THE FLOW

Given the very high turnover of foster carers, and the significant loss of experience, skills and expertise that this represents, an obvious place to start thinking about how to increase effective capacity is in improving retention. Here, Figure 5 demonstrates the scale of the current challenge, showing that three in ten deregistrations (29%) currently take place within the first two-years of fostering.

Figure 5: Length of time between approval and deregistration for deregistrations in year to end of March 2020



Source: Ofsted

Notes: Excludes family and friends and fostering to adopt, as these are, by their nature, typically much shorter durations and would bias the figures.

Existing evidence also shows that two thirds of deregistrations (66%) were initiated by the foster carer.⁶ Of course, there will always be some carers who leave for personal and unavoidable reasons; the most popular reason given on the Fostering Network survey is retirement.⁷ However, the number of carers who leave the system each year points to a systemic problem with the experience of foster care that these carers are having.

Tackling this issue is clearly important; a more stable foster carer population would build experience and expertise, save significant costs of recruitment and, ultimately, likely improve the quality of care and support provided and children’s outcomes. However, getting to the bottom of the issue is difficult, as little data is collected on why carers leave the system.

For example, our Freedom of Information request asked local authorities about their approach to deregistrations and whether they undertook exit interviews in order to understand the reasons why carers left. Overall, a small number of local authorities (39

in total) said that they routinely offered all carers exit interviews. Around the same number (34) offered either voluntary exit interviews, or used other informal alternatives, but did not routinely record the responses/insight drawn from these. Some 29 local authorities said that they did not offer exit interviews at all.

Thankfully, other existing evidence fills some of these gaps. For example, it shows that, while fostering can be an incredibly rewarding role, it can also be stressful and challenging.⁸ As a result, only around a half (55%) of foster carers would recommend fostering and we heard that foster carers face a number of issues and challenges which leave some foster carers feeling unsatisfied.⁹ Some of the most common issues raised were: being treated professionally; being fairly remunerated; getting the support they need; and having access to appropriate training in their role.¹⁰

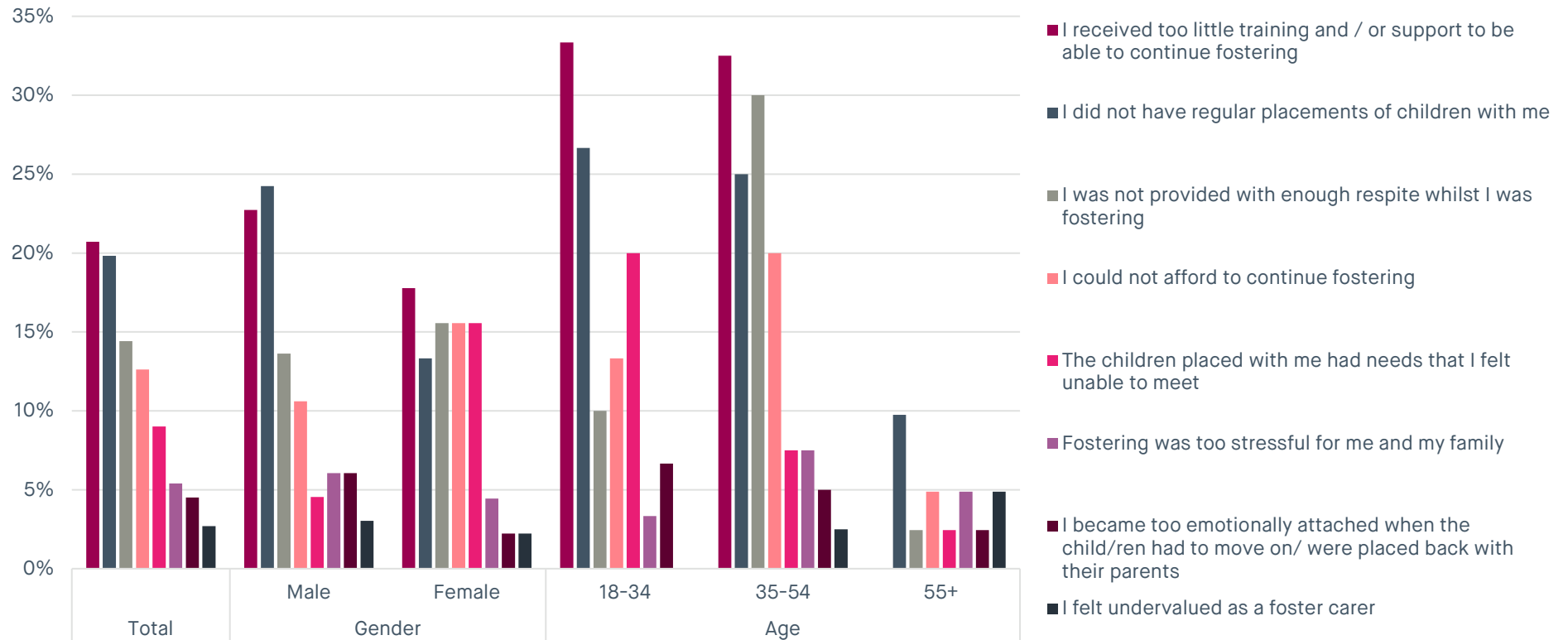
To understand in more depth some of the reasons why foster carers deregister, our polling with people who had given up foster caring asked about the reasons behind this. The results are shown in Figure 6.

Overall, it shows that there are a wide range of reasons that contribute to foster carers deregistering. These also vary significantly by groups of different ages. The clearest reason for those aged 55 and over was their age, with six in ten of this age group (61%) feeling that they were now too old to foster (note that, for ease of display, this is not shown in the chart). Other key reasons for people no longer fostering included:

- **Receiving too little training or support**, where one in three of those aged between 18 and 54 said that this contributed to them no longer fostering.
- **Not receiving enough respite**, with nearly three in ten of those aged 35-54 (30%) citing this as a reason (and 14% for all age groups).
- **Not being able to afford it**, with one in five (20%) of those aged 35-54 citing this reason.
- **Not receiving enough placements**, with one in five (20%) of previous foster carers citing this as a reason.
- **Being unable to meet the children's needs**, with one in five of those aged 18-34 (20%) citing this reason.

Of course, many of these factors will interact with each other. For example, given the concerns of younger foster carers about training and support, it is no surprise that, more than other groups, they felt that children placed with them had needs that they were unable to meet. A large proportion (19%) of all groups also cited “other reasons” for stopping fostering.

Figure 6: Factors that contributed to decisions to give up fostering



Source: *Opinium on behalf of SMF*

This shows that understanding the reasons why foster carers deregister is complex. However, key factors can be identified and, with more evidence in this area, significant steps could be taken towards developing interventions that tackle these issues and support more foster carers to remain in the system. The following sections provide more evidence on some of these key issues, drawn from existing evidence and our work with foster carers as part of this report. It is worth noting that none of these issues is new; other reports, over a large number of years, have identified them. However, they remain relevant and too little has been done to address them.

Valuing and respecting the role of foster carers

While many carers feel they are treated professionally and valued as part of the support team, a sizeable number often feel that they are not listened to or consulted on key issues relating to the care of their foster child. Participants in our focus group of foster carers said they sometimes feel excluded from discussions leading to important decisions about their foster child and so do not feel like an equal member of the team. One participant said:

“...the attitude towards foster carers is the core of the problem. They don’t expect us to be professional workers. They don’t expect much from us.”

The Fostering Network’s research has found more than 40% of foster carers do not feel they are treated as an equal and valued member of the team.¹¹

We also heard that some foster carers do not feel valued or trusted as they have to consult with local authorities or the child’s social worker over insignificant decisions about the children, such as needing permission from the birth parent to have the child’s hair cut. Not only can it be frustrating for the foster carer, but it can also affect the child and leave them feeling different from their peers, embarrassed and upset.¹² And our work with foster carers reiterated findings from other reports that suggest that some foster carers are confused about what decisions they are allowed to make independently, causing frustration for them and the children in their care.¹³

Fair remuneration

Foster carers need to be able to support themselves and their families, but it is often difficult to combine other paid work with fostering because some fostering services require there to be at least one full-time foster carer in the home. A recent survey of foster carers found that 40% were required or pressurised to give up their job by their fostering service and 29% were expected to reduce their hours of work.¹⁴ And even amongst those carers who continue to work while fostering, some feel unsupported by their employers, making it difficult to balance the responsibilities of caring with their work. It is therefore essential that carers are compensated so that they are able to maintain a family home and support themselves while they foster children.

Foster carers are paid an allowance by their fostering provider every week, which is intended to cover the costs of caring for a child. The Government sets an annual minimum rate, which all foster carers should receive, depending on the area of England and the age and needs of the child. This ranges from £134 to £235 a week.¹⁵ Many fostering services also pay carers a fee, on top of the fostering allowance, which can vary depending on factors such as the specific needs of a child or skills of a foster carer. It is up to fostering services to decide the fee rates and amounts paid can vary significantly between providers.

Foster carers also receive additional financial support through the tax and benefit system. They get tax relief for every child that lives with them and are treated more favourably in the benefit system. For example, fostering allowances and fees are fully disregarded when calculating their entitlement to means tested benefits and some local authorities do not require foster carers to pay council tax.

However, despite the benefits and fees, many foster carers are not getting enough income to cover the costs of caring for a child. In a report covering 2019/20, the Fostering Network found that 11 out of 57 local authorities paid less than the government minimum allowance in at least one age category.¹⁶ The results show that some foster carers continue to be paid less than even the national minimum standard. It is perhaps not surprising then that only 4 out of 10 foster carers feel their costs of looking after children are being met,¹⁷ and that a significant reason for deregistering amongst some groups in our polling was being unable to afford fostering.

We also heard that some carers are confused about their income. A number of carers report receiving their fees and allowances as a lump sum, despite national minimum standards which state that there should be a clear distinction between the two amounts.¹⁸ Evidence submitted to the Education Select Committee also suggests that the tax system is complex and unclear for many carers, which can leave carers confused about what income they can receive.¹⁹

Foster carers are self-employed workers and so not eligible for the benefits that typically come with employee status, such as sick and holiday pay. Importantly, very few carers receive a retainer fee between placements, which can leave very little incentive for carers to take a break.²⁰ Yet, as discussed below, it is vital that carers are able to take breaks from caring when they need to, for their own well-being and the welfare of the child.

Respite

Foster carers should be able to take a break from caring when they need to.²¹ Respite care can lower stress and has also been linked to increased satisfaction with fostering.²² However, access to respite care is variable, with just over one in three (37%) of foster carers rating their respite services as excellent, good or acceptable.²³ Only two out of eleven participants in our focus group said that they were happy with their access to respite care if they needed it. These findings may in part reflect a lack of alternative carers for the children while the foster carer goes on a break. Indeed, the number of households primarily offering short-break placements fell between 2015/16 and 2019/20.²⁴ And as highlighted above, some carers are put off taking a break between placements because they face no income when they do not have a child in their care.²⁵

Peer support from other foster carers is one of the most important and valued sources of support for foster carers.²⁶ For example, mentoring and buddying schemes, where more experienced carers are paired with new carers, or online support schemes could help.²⁷ However, evidence suggests formal peer support schemes are not yet widespread.

One promising model, which combines peer support and access to respite care for foster carers is the “Mockingbird family” pilot. The model centres on one foster home which acts as a hub and offers planned and emergency sleepovers and short breaks, advice and training and support to 6-10 fostering or kinship care families around it.

Although costly, early pilot evaluations suggest its design is likely to increase resilience and improve foster carer retention.²⁸

Training

All new foster carers must complete the DfE's Training, Support and Development Standards, which define a minimum standard for what foster carers should know, understand and be able to do, within their first 12-18 months of being approved as a foster carer.²⁹ The local Authority or IFA can decide whether a foster carer needs additional training and if so, what training they should get. Many local authorities use a tiered training system, often linked to pay, where competencies are developed in building block stages.³⁰

However, this delegated approach to training leads to variation in the standard, amount and content of training that carers receive and little or no systematic recording of the skills, training and competencies of foster carers across the country.³¹ This comes with a clear risk that some carers are not getting sufficient training in their role and that a lack of sufficiently trained foster carers will mean children in foster care being matched with unsuitable placements.³²

Where unsuitable placements do happen (for example outside of a particular foster carer's approved provision), foster carers highlight that this rarely comes with training needed to provide the support needed. For example, in a Fostering Network review, more than three-quarters (78%) of carers who were asked to look after a child outside of the age and needs they were approved for said they were not given additional support or training.³³ And only 60% of foster carers have a learning and development plan for the next 12 months, with foster carers in local authorities much less likely to have a plan than carers in IFAs (around 50% of carers in local authorities compared to around 80% in IFAs).^{34,35} There is a risk that this picture worsens, as financial pressures on local Authority budgets has already led to cuts in non-mandatory training offered to foster carers.³⁶

Most of the foster carers in our focus group said the training they received was too generic and failed to cover the increasingly complex needs that children face. They also highlighted challenges with fitting their training around their caring responsibilities – some noted training was offered outside school hours and not nearby – while also ensuring the training was relevant and appropriate to their needs.

Furthermore, a delegated approach to training can also make it more difficult for carers to move region and fostering service as they need to be re-assessed and re-trained. This can be a time-consuming process, which delays good foster carers from looking after a child in need.

CHAPTER FOUR - RECRUITMENT: HOW TO ATTRACT MORE PEOPLE (BACK) TO FOSTERING

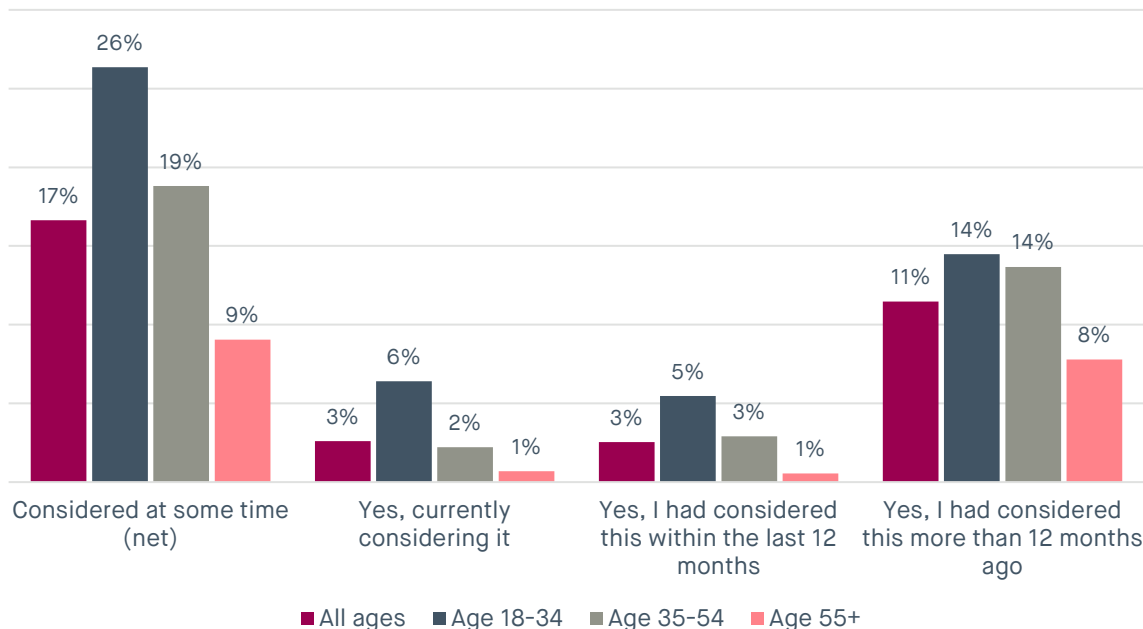
Even if retention were to improve, it is very likely that ensuring effective capacity is sufficient across the foster care system will require a significant recruitment exercise. This will need to ensure both that the number people becoming foster carers increases and the people recruited have the requisite skills, training and capabilities to meet the needs of children requiring fostering. This section considers how to ensure this happens.

Are people attracted to fostering?

The starting point for recruiting people to become foster carers is for them to be attracted to the prospect of fostering. This means that they need to actively consider being a foster carer and have the information they need to decide whether to take this interest forward.

On the former of these, our polling shows that significant numbers of people have previously considered or are currently considering fostering. Figure 7 shows that 17% of respondents had considered fostering. The proportion varies significantly by age group, with one in four (26%) of those aged between 18 and 34 having considered fostering at some point, compared to one in ten of those aged 55 and over.

Figure 7: Proportion of different groups who have considered fostering

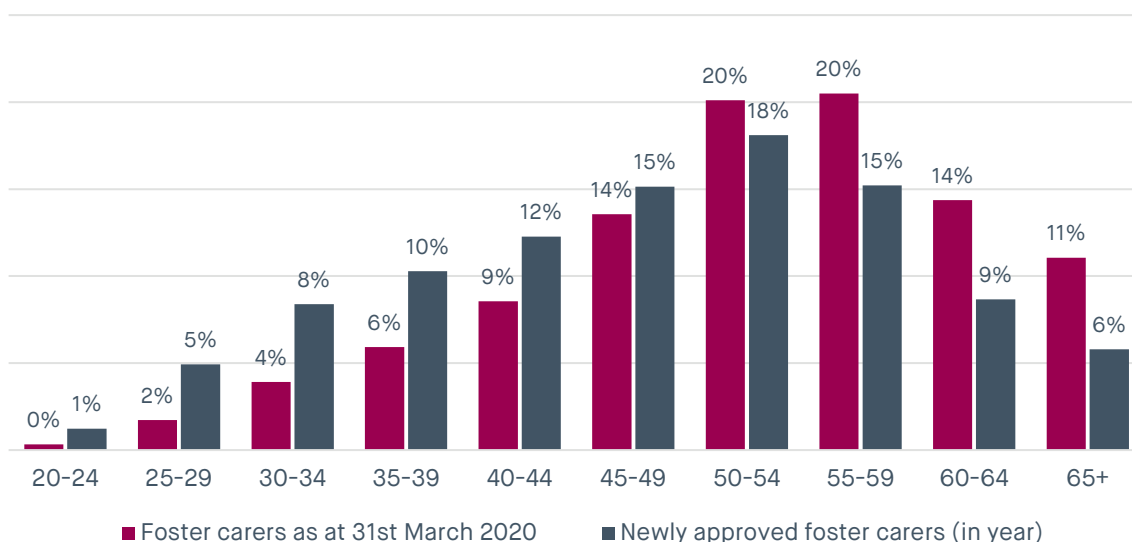


Source: *Opinium on behalf of SMF*

The polling also reveals that 6% of those aged 18-34 are currently considering fostering. This suggests that 300,000 people in the 18-34 age group alone are currently considering fostering.³⁷

This is particularly interesting because it is in stark contrast to the age profile of current foster carers. Figure 8 shows that nine in ten (88%) current foster carers are aged over 40, two thirds (66%) were 50 or older and one in four (25%) 60 and older. The age profile of newly approved foster carers also matches this age profile, with half (48%) of those newly registered in the year to end of March 2020, being aged 50 or over. This suggests that there is a group of younger adults with an interest in fostering that is not currently being tapped into.

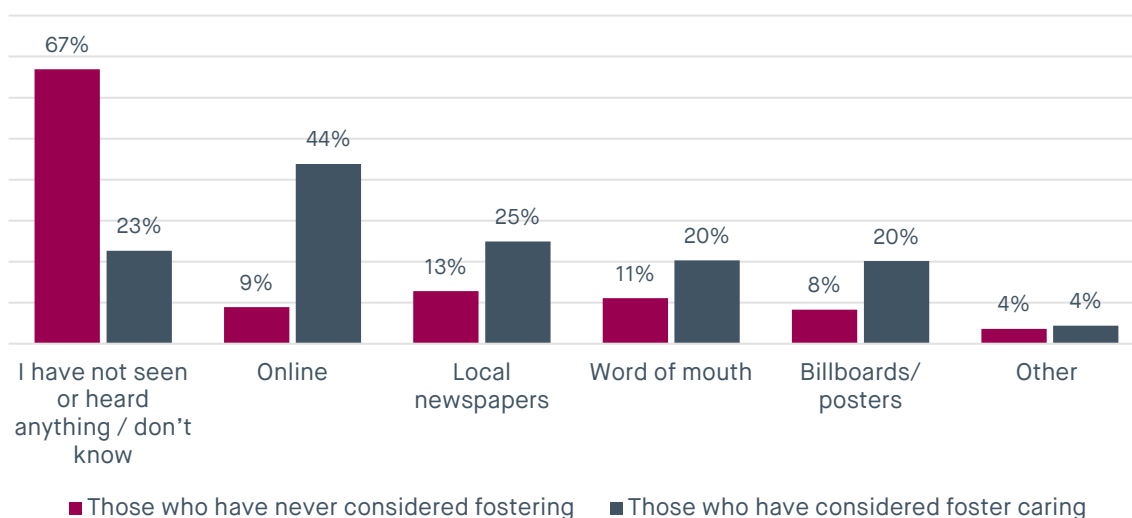
Figure 8: Foster carers by age, end March 2020



Source: DfE

Our polling also shows that many people have seen or heard about opportunities to become a foster carer. Amongst those who had previously considered, or are currently considering becoming a foster carer, less than one in four said that they had not seen or heard about opportunities to become a foster carer.

Figure 9: Where people have seen information on fostering opportunities

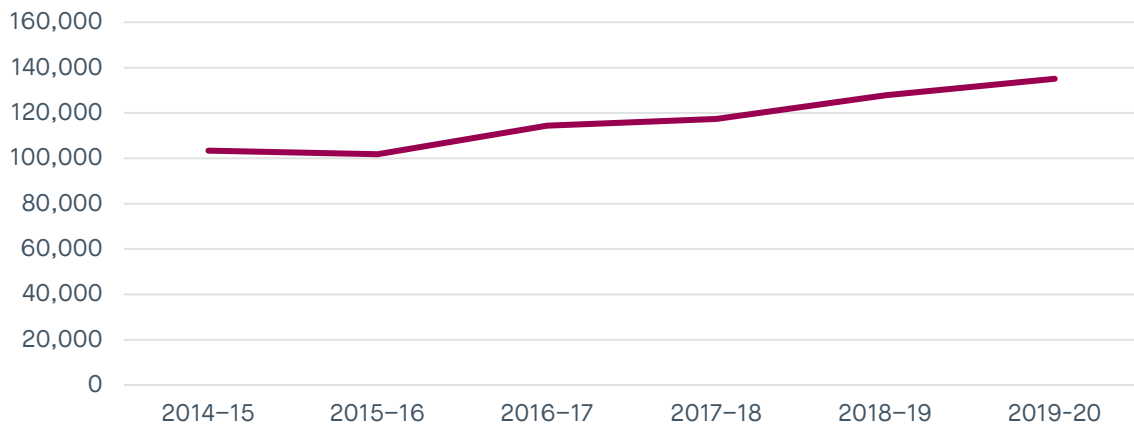


Source: Opinion on behalf of SMF

Despite many people having an interest in fostering, and having seen information about opportunities to become a foster carer, the challenge is that relatively small numbers of those saying they have an interest in fostering actually formally enquire about opportunities.

In this respect, it is positive that the number of people enquiring about becoming a foster carer have risen in recent years (Figure 10) However, given the size of the group that said they were currently considering fostering in our polling, these initial enquiries represent only the tip of the iceberg in terms of those who are interested. This means that encouraging even a small proportion of this group to formally enquire and then apply could make a huge difference to recruitment.

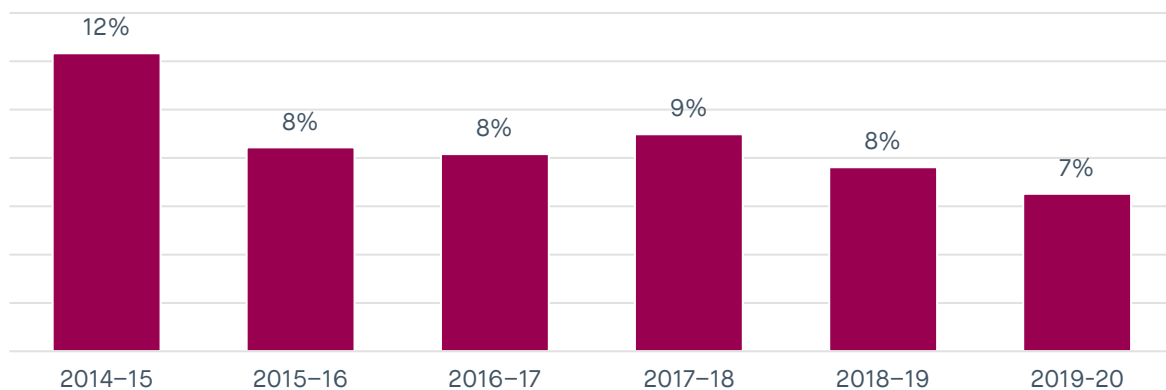
Figure 10: Initial enquiries about becoming a foster carer in England



Source: Ofsted

It is here that another challenge is presented. That is that the vast majority of enquiries do not currently translate into applications. For example, in 2019/20, there were more than 135,000 initial enquiries in England, but fewer than 9,000 applications, meaning that the conversion rate is around 7%. And, although the number of enquiries increased over the last five years of data, there was a 31% *fall* in number of applications to become a foster carer over the same period. Overall, the proportion of those enquiring about fostering who actually end up applying has fallen over time (Figure 11)

Figure 11: Proportion of initial enquiries that apply to become a foster carer.



Source: Ofsted

Overall, this shows that many people are attracted to fostering, but too few take the next step to actually formally enquire about opportunities. Fewer still then apply to become a foster carer. Therefore, this leaves us with two questions:

1. How to provide information that attracts people to formally explore the potential to foster; and
2. How to ensure a higher conversion rate from enquiries to applications and, ultimately, registrations.

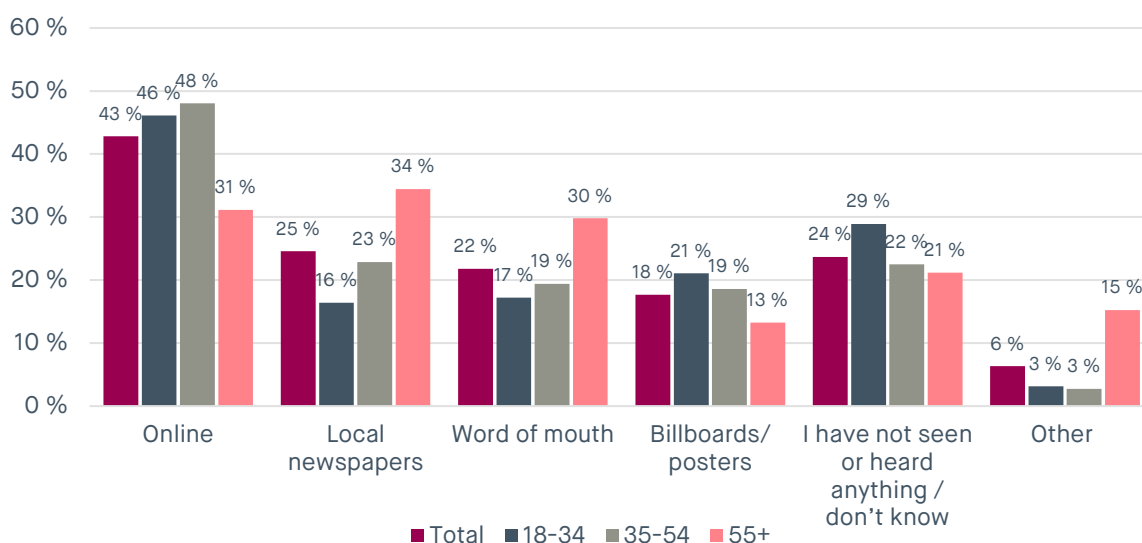
Turning interest into enquiries

We also heard from foster carers interviewed as part of this research, that it can be difficult to get clear and helpful information about becoming a foster carer and this puts people off from applying. This was also borne out by responses to the polling we undertook with people considering becoming a foster carer. For example, of those who would consider becoming a foster carer:

- More than one in four (26%) said that they did not have all the information they needed to make an informed decision.
- Nearly four in ten (39%) said that they still had unresolved questions about foster caring, which weren't addressed by the available information.

It is also important to remember that information needs to be accessible and understandable through a range of different sources. For example, while evidence suggests that word of mouth can be an effective recruitment tool,³⁸ some groups are more likely than others to receive information in this way. This is shown in Figure 12 which demonstrates that those aged 55 and over are more likely than other age groups to have gained information through word of mouth and local newspapers. This means that recruitment activities focussed on particular routes, like word of mouth “coffee mornings” might fail to attract the diversity of interest that is likely to be required to meet the needs of children needing foster care.

Figure 12: Where people have seen information on fostering opportunities, by age



Source: Opinium on behalf of SMF

Alongside a lack of clear information, we also heard that competition between local authorities and IFPs to recruit carers can result in multiple recruitment campaigns, with confusing and conflicting information. As well as being damaging to the prospects of recruiting enough foster carers, this puts pressure on costs and effective matching of prospective carers. For example, previous research found that, as local authorities and IFPs compete against each other “...they vie for the attention of prospective carers, increasing the costs of marketing and eventually, the costs of fostering.”³⁹ Prospective carers can also end up with the service provider that advertised effectively, rather than “...the one who would be the best fit or offer the best support.”⁴⁰

Turning interest into applications

Even if more people were attracted to fostering and had information available about the opportunities that are available, there is then the question of how to ensure that more of them follow through with that interest and actually apply. The starting point here is that, as shown above, large numbers of people already make enquiries about fostering but do not end up applying. As highlighted in other reviews, increasing the likelihood of enquiries leading to applications should be a key focus for local authorities and IFAs.

Of course, not all enquiries will turn into applications as people may decide fostering is not right for them at that time. However, evidence suggests that enquiries are not handled effectively. For example, previous research used a mystery shopper to enquire about fostering with local authorities and IFPs, but instead of welcoming her enquiry, most asked her questions around why she may not be suitable for fostering, such as how many bedrooms she had or if she smoked. Overall, the mystery shopper was only happy to pursue fostering with only 6 of the 25 organisations they approached.⁴¹

Aside from how effectively enquiries are dealt with, ensuring that more people turn enquiries into applications will involve developing a better understanding of the motivations that lie behind people’s interest in fostering and why, if they are interested, they are not currently a foster carer.

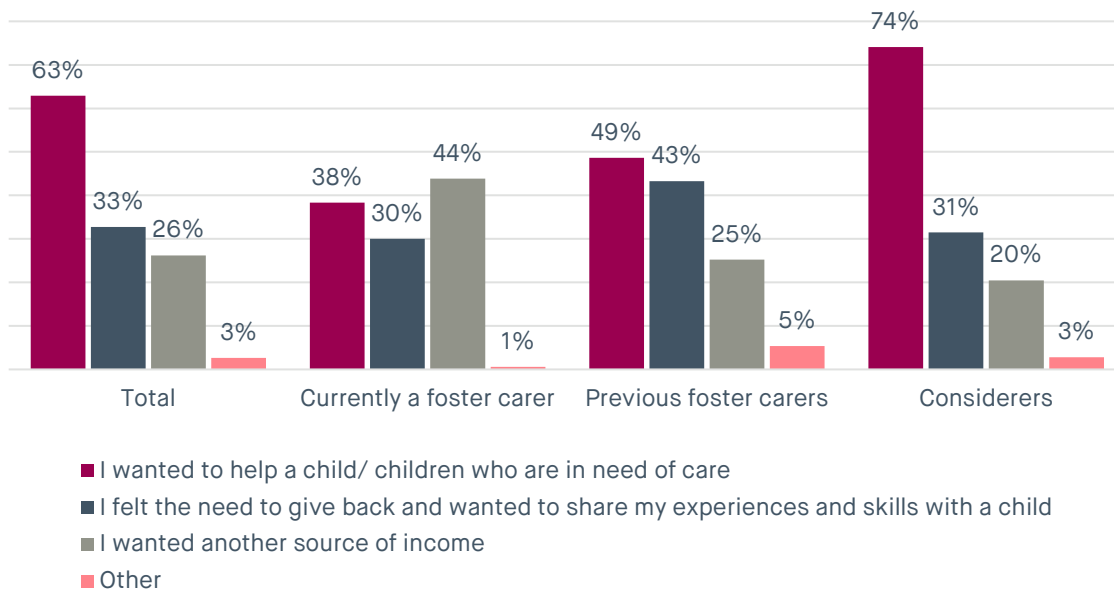
Other reports have considered this question, however many of these have only considered the motivations and attitudes of existing foster carers, rather than considering the motivations and barriers faced by those who consider fostering, but do not take it forward.⁴² In understanding how to improve recruitment, it is this latter group that is relevant.

For this reason, research for this report considered current foster carers and those who have considered but are not currently fostering. It also considered those who have previously been carers but have now stopped (as they could be attracted back to fostering). The headline finding is that results from the three groups demonstrate different motivations and attitudes. This would suggest that, to increase the number and diversity of applications, recruitment exercises would need to be tailored to tap into the motivations and drivers of these different groups.

A key example is shown in Figure 13, which shows why different groups report to be interested in fostering. It shows that, for current foster parents, factors were fairly evenly split between child-focussed factors (helping a child or sharing experiences

and skills) and the desire to have another source of income. This contrasts with those who are or have considered fostering, where helping children was by far the most commonly reported factor (with 74% of the group suggesting it).

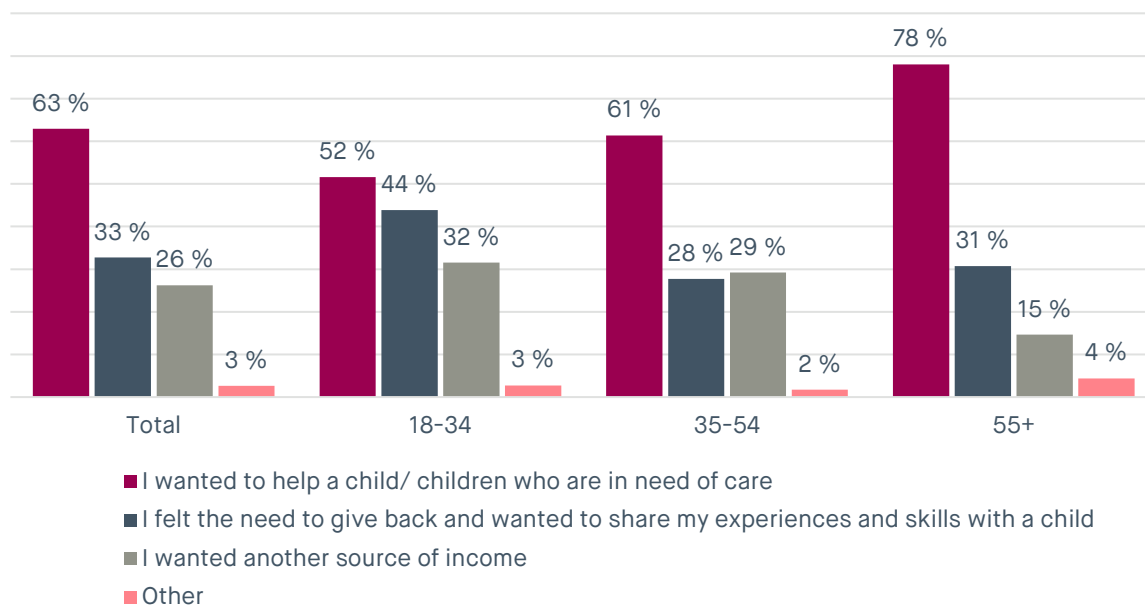
Figure 13: Factors contributing to decision to foster/consider fostering



Source: *Opinium on behalf of SMF*

There are also significant differences between people of different ages (Figure 14). For example, those who are considering/have considered fostering who are aged between 18 and 34 are more likely than any other age group to say that they “felt the need to give back and wanted to share my experiences and skills with a child”.

Figure 14: Factors contributing to decision to foster / consider fostering, by age

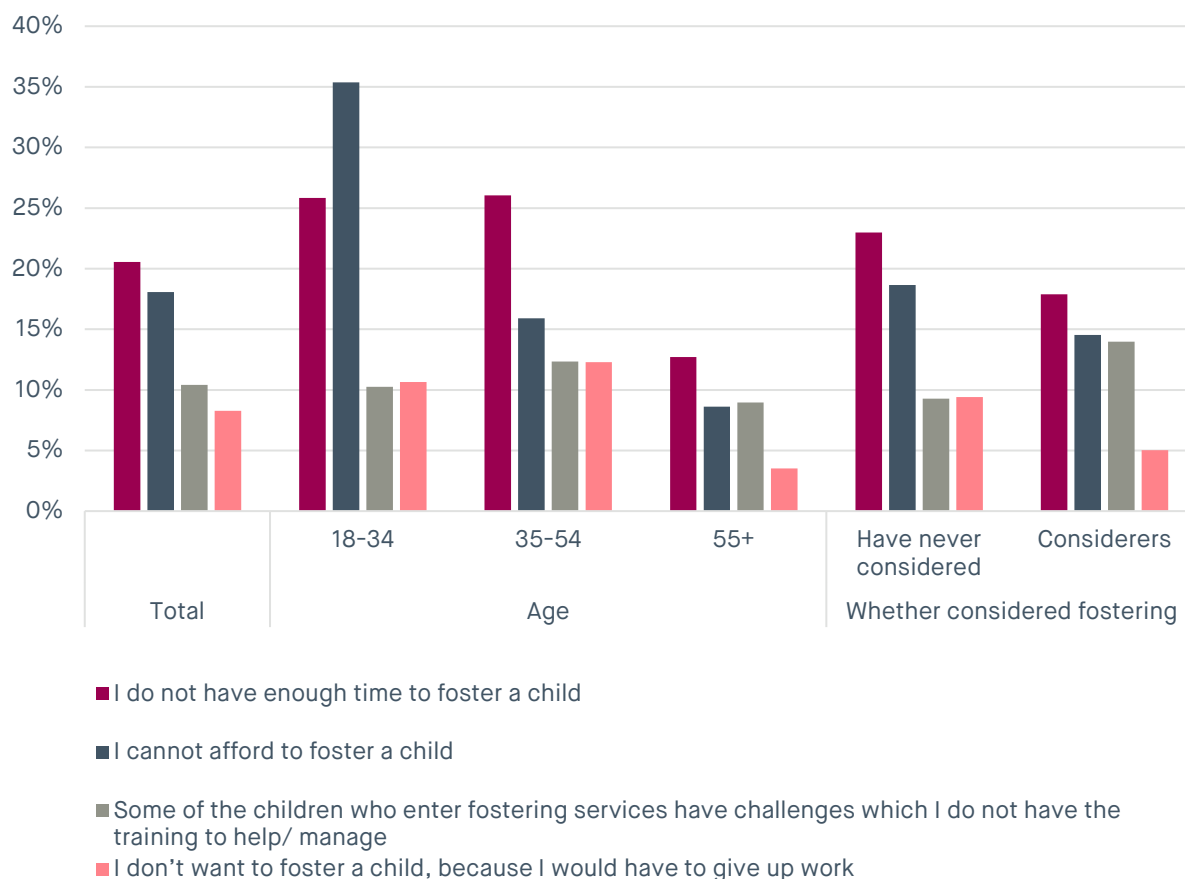


Source: *Opinium on behalf of SMF*

Understanding these differences in motivations between those considering fostering and those already fostering, and between different age groups is vital if we are going to recruit more people to become foster carers. In turn, it is important to understand the barriers that exist which meant that many of those who consider fostering do not take their interest forward. Doing so shows that there are a set of key issues, including (Figure 15):

- **Not having enough time**, with one in four considerers (18%) citing this as a reason for not going ahead with fostering.
- **Not being able to afford fostering**, with 15% of considerers, and 35% of 18–34-year-olds citing this as a reason.
- **Not being able to meet the needs of foster children**, with 14% of considerers citing this as a reason.

Figure 15: Most commonly cited reasons for people not being a foster carer



Source: *Opinium on behalf of SMF*

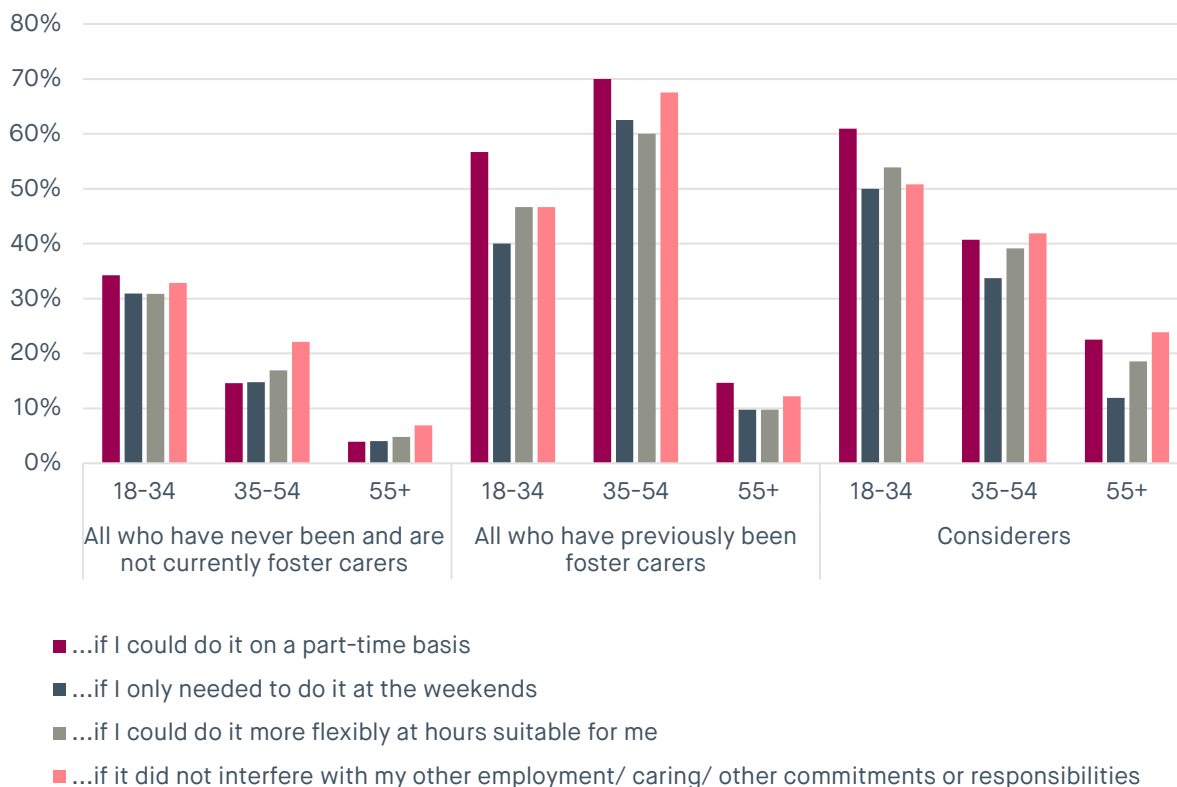
Of course, many of these issues will interact with each other, but these results do point to areas where people considering fostering are put off. To explore this further, we asked a range of questions about the factors that would make it more likely for people to consider fostering. We split these between factors associated with flexibility (noting that many people highlighted a lack of time as being a barrier) and factors associated with conditions (noting that many people highlighted affordability as being a barrier).

On the former of these, Figure 16 shows results from questions about whether increasing the flexibility of foster care would attract more people to become foster carers. Here we see that a significant number of both considerers and those who have previously been foster carers (but are no longer registered) would be more attracted into/back to fostering if the flexibility of foster care were increased. For example:

- Seven in ten (70%) previous foster carers aged between 35 and 54 would be more likely to consider fostering again if they could do it on a part-time basis. More than six in ten of this same group would be more inclined to consider fostering again if they could do it at the weekends (63%), more flexibly (60%) or in a way that did not interfere with their other employment/caring commitments (68%).
- Considerers aged between 18 and 34 also respond strongly to the potential of increased flexibility. Six in ten (61%) of this group would be more likely to consider fostering if they could do it part time. And around half would be more likely to consider it with the other forms of flexibility.

Of course, given the nature of fostering, under standard models, flexibility is hard to deliver. Once a child is in the placement, it is essentially a full-time commitment. However, there are ways in which the appetite of these groups could be tapped into in order to relieve the pressure on the system. For example, these groups would seem an obvious target for recruitment to facilitate respite (see next section).

Figure 16: Factors of flexibility that increase the likelihood of different groups considering fostering (for the first time, or again)



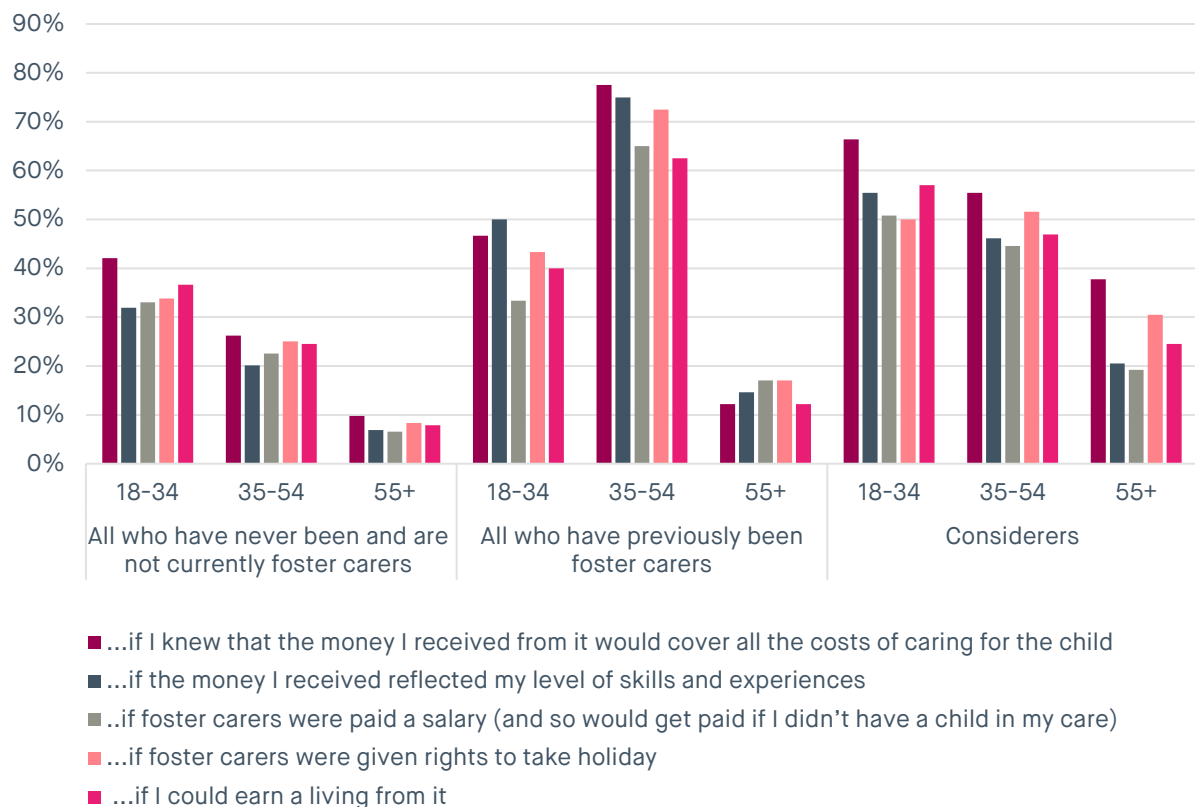
Source: *Opinium on behalf of SMF*

Figure 17 turns to look at factors around the conditions of foster carers that could be used to increase the likelihood of different groups considering fostering. As with factors around flexibility, large proportions of those aged 18-54 (in both the group of previous foster carers and considerers) say that improvements in these factors would make it more likely for them to consider fostering again or for the first time.

For example, more than seven in ten of those aged 35-54 who had previously been foster carers said that they would be more likely to foster again if the money received would cover the costs of caring for the child (78%) and if it reflected their skills and experience (75%). A similar proportion (73%) said they would be more likely to consider fostering again if they were given rights to take holiday.

Each of these issues was also popular with younger groups of considerers. For example, two in three (66%) of 18-34 year old considerers said they would be more likely to consider fostering if the money received covered the costs of caring for the child. Nearly six in ten (57%) of the same group said they would be more likely to consider fostering if they were given rights to take holiday.

Figure 17: Changes to conditions that increase the likelihood of different groups considering fostering (for the first time, or again)



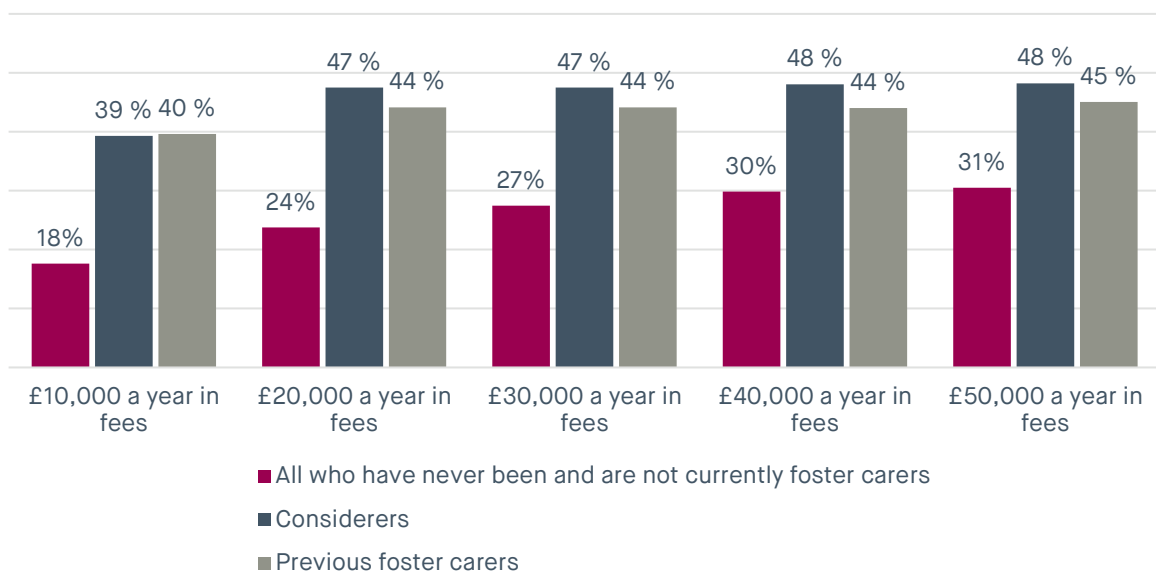
Source: *Opinium on behalf of SMF*

Finally, figures 18 and 19 consider the issue of pay in more detail. We asked how much different groups would need to be guaranteed to receive in excess of compensation for the costs of caring for the child, in order to consider fostering/fostering again. All groups indicated that a guaranteed income in excess of the costs of caring for a child

would make it more likely for them to consider fostering/fostering again. For example, more than half (54%) of 18-34 year olds considering fostering indicated that they would be more attracted to fostering with each of the levels of income.

However, perhaps the most interesting finding here is that, for most groups, there is relatively little impact on responses as the amount of guaranteed income increases. The group showing the largest increase in likelihood of a positive response as the amount of income increased, was 35-54 year old considerers. For this group, 39% would be more attracted to fostering if yearly fees were £10,000 more than that required to meet additional costs, compared to 55% for £50,000 of additional fees.

Figure 18: Income (additional to costs) that would attract different groups to consider fostering



Source: *Opinium on behalf of SMF*

Figure 19: Income (additional to costs) that would attract different groups to consider fostering



Source: *Opinium on behalf of SMF*

Summary

Overall, these results show that large numbers of people would consider, and are considering, becoming foster carers. However, many of these are being put off by a range of factors including, time, money and the challenging nature of fostering. In each of these areas, many more prospective foster carers could be attracted to fostering if steps were taken to address these issues. This is also true for previous foster carers who are no longer registered; here, large numbers could be attracted to return to fostering if it could be tailored to provide them with the conditions, support and flexibility they need. For each of these groups, those aged between 18 and 34 are more likely to say they could be made more likely to consider fostering; showing that there is a huge pool of fostering resource that could be tapped with the right reforms. The next chapter considers areas where these might focus.

CHAPTER FIVE – RECOMMENDATIONS

The first report in this series highlighted a number of significant concerns about the extent to which the foster care system in England currently has the capacity to meet the needs of children who require foster care. If this is going to be turned around, at any one time, we are going to need more people and families to be providing foster care. Doing this in a way that also delivers the diversity of backgrounds, skills and characteristics needed to meet the needs of fostered children will require us to both improve the retention of current foster carers and attract more people to become foster carers and return to fostering if they have already left.

This report has highlighted the key areas where action should be taken to make this possible. Recommendations based on these are set out below.

1. Introducing a Foster Carers' Charter

This report has shown a range of areas where the support, conditions and wellbeing of foster carers are currently leading to deregistrations and undermining recruitment activities. As such, improvements will be central to ensuring that more foster carers are recruited and then retained within the system.

The first step here is to ensure that there is much greater clarity on the rights and responsibilities of foster carers within the system and the support and conditions that they should expect to receive. This would ensure both that current and prospective carers have a better understanding of what to expect from the system and that local authorities and IFPs can be held to account for delivering on these standards.

For these reasons we believe that the rights and responsibilities of the foster carer, including their decision-making rights, pay and access to respite care, and corporate parent (i.e. the local authority) should be defined in a Foster Carers' Charter. This would build on the national charter that already exists, but it is not enforced. Less than half of the foster carers in our focus group were aware that a charter existed and of those who were aware, none felt it had made any difference. The charter is also not specific about rights and responsibilities, instead relying on free text boxes to allow for variation across local authorities. As a result, the charter is currently a redundant tool for supporting foster carers.

Instead, the charter should include specific and measurable commitments, with nationally agreed minimum standards, that can be built upon based on the circumstances of a particular placement. so that carers are very clear about their rights and responsibilities. The Fostering Network have developed a charter that offers a helpful starting point. We think the current version could go further, for example by being more specific about the decisions that foster carers can and cannot make independently. The charter needs to be an active document that carers and local authorities actually refer to, which could be supported by making it mandatory for each foster carer to sign the charter, alongside their local authority and including the charter in training for each professional member of the child's support team.

Key features that the charter should cover to ensure that foster carers receive the support and conditions they need to provide effective care, include: a right to respite

care, training and support and a nationally agreed set of minimum standards for foster care retainers and top ups.

2. A right to access respite care, training and support

Research shows that respite care, including holidays, is important for the well-being of foster carers and so the long-run quality of care for the child and the retention of foster carers. Our polling also shows that providing guaranteed respite and holidays would significantly increase the attractiveness of fostering for many prospective and previous foster carers (particularly younger adults).

As such, we believe that foster carers should be provided nationally agreed minimum standards for access to respite, both whilst they have a child placed with them and between placements. To ensure that they are able to do so without unduly causing stress and disruption to the child, as highlighted above, this will require recruiting more places that are specifically targeted as short-term (potentially weekend) care, which has the added potential to attract more potential carers to the system.

All foster carers should also have access to training to ensure they have the skills needed to give the best possible care to children. They should also be encouraged to develop and widen their skills, so they are able to manage a greater range of children's needs. That means ensuring foster carers have access to effective training at a time and place that fits around their caring responsibilities. This might include learning and support from experienced foster carers, again, similar to the approach used in the Mockingbird model.

We agree with the Education Select Committee's recommendation that the Government should work with foster carers, experts and third sector organisations to design training resources and make them available nationally. We also believe that the charter should require that all foster carers have a development plan to ensure they are aware of and addressing their development needs.

3. Foster carer retainers and top ups.

Our research highlighted a number of issues around foster carer pay. For example, some carers are not paid the minimum allowance to cover the costs of caring and because carers do not get paid if they do not have a child in their care, they are disincentivised from taking a break from caring despite the stress and challenges involved.

Tackling these issues is central to attracting and retaining foster carers to the system; our polling showed that affordability is one of the biggest factors that leads to deregistrations and contributes to a lack of appetite to become foster carers.

However, we recognise that foster carer pay is the subject of significant debate. There are also a range of possible models to address these challenges. The most straightforward would be consulting on national minimum allowance levels to ensure funding meets the actual costs of care, as recommended by the Education Select Committee.⁴³ We think the range of possible options should be explored in more detail by the Review of Children's Social Care, or a separate review commissioned by that.

Whilst all the options should be explored in detail, we believe that the most promising is to pay carers a baseline “retainer” irrespective of whether they have a child in their care. This would mean that carers receive a payment for being “on the books” and this is supplemented with a fee and allowance (to reflect the extra costs of having the child placed with them) when a child is placed with them. Of course, this could create perverse incentives, such as for carers not to take on children for prolonged periods of time. However, there are ways to mitigate these incentives, such as setting limits for break periods with possibilities for extension by exception and agreement with the fostering provider. This would provide incentives for local authorities to manage their foster carers more effectively.

Rolled out nationally, we also recognise that this would have significant implications both for the legal status of foster carers (i.e. as workers or employees) and for the overall costs of the system. However, given the clear message from our research that affordability is putting people off fostering and leading to existing foster carers leaving the system, we believe that this is a price worth paying to get the quality and consistency of support needed for some of the most vulnerable children in society.

4. Increasing the recruitment of flexible foster carers

One of the biggest things that puts many prospective carers off is the lack of flexibility in the current system of fostering. This means that increasing flexibility could attract a large number of people to become foster carers. This is particularly true of younger adults (aged under 34), where half or more of those already considering fostering would be attracted to it if they could do it part time, or only at weekends. This approach would also likely prove attractive to people who are in work, and who do not want to give up work to foster.

To tap into this interest, new weekend or part-time fostering roles should be created and recruited for. Doing so could also work with other recommendations above to guarantee full-time foster carers respite and improve support for all foster carers.

For example, this could see a new part-time foster family agreeing to provide a placement for half of the weekends of a year. They could then be matched with six full-time foster families and agree to provide weekend respite care for the children placed with them roughly once a month for each family. If this approach was combined with recruitment from younger pool of prospective carers and focussed on those in work, this approach could also provide the foster child with contact with an additional adult role model.

Of course, this is just one way that this could work and we believe that the Care Review should consider this issue in detail and make recommendations for how this approach could be taken forward.

5. Launching a nationally-coordinated recruitment drive

The recommendations above could go a long way towards making the foster care system more attractive to prospective carers and ensuring that existing carers have the support and conditions needed for them to want to stay in the system.

However, it is not enough to make the system better. People also need to know about the challenges and the opportunities that exist within the foster care system. We have already seen that large numbers of people, and particularly younger adults, have an interest in fostering, but do not follow through with this interest. Evidence in this report has also pointed to the fact that a large part of this problem is a result of poor information, messaging and handling of enquiries by local authorities and IFPs.

For this reason, we believe that the Government should work with the fostering sector to develop a nationally-coordinated recruitment campaign. This would ensure consistency of messaging and national-reach, and could deliver significant economies of scale compared to local authorities and IFPs having to develop and implement a significant increase in their own advertising activity. Given the diversity of attitudes and motivations of different groups with an interest in fostering, this campaign needs to be both well-targeted and delivered through a range of different channels.

Conclusion

The number of children in foster care, and the diversity and depth of their needs has increased over the last decade and looks set to continue to increase. Meeting the needs of these children will mean recruiting and retaining a large number of foster carers and ensuring that this recruitment brings people with the right skills, personal qualities and experience to the system. The first report in this series showed how central and local government could work together to develop a better understanding of what this recruitment needs to deliver.

This report builds on that work to show how, with a clear understanding of recruitment needs, that recruitment exercise could be used to attract more people to the system. It has also shown what needs to change in order to ensure that fewer foster carers leave the system. Across these areas we have made five recommendations. If taken forward, we believe that these recommendations would support an increase in recruitment and improve retention and, in doing so, help to ensure that effective capacity within the foster care system is improved. Ultimately, our hope is that these approaches could contribute to an improvement in outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children in our society.

ENDNOTES

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/629383/The_fostering_system_in_England_Evidence_review.pdf

² All polling cited in this report as below, unless otherwise stated. Opinium surveyed 1,932 UK adults (18+) between 22nd and 25th October 2019 and 828 UK adults; 180 foster carers, 537 considerers; 111 who previously were foster carers, between the same dates.

³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/629384/Evidence_review_-_Executive_summary.pdf page 22

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2019-to-31-march-2020/fostering-in-england-2019-to-2020-main-findings>; <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/9fb76a8e-ab86-4746-871a-925810cfb302>

⁵ <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/news/2017/charity-calls-7000-more-foster-families-particularly-teens-and-siblings>

⁶https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/774464/Fostering_in_England_2017-18_dataset.csv/preview

⁷ <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/research/state-nations-foster-care-2019>

⁸https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/629383/The_fostering_system_in_England_Evidence_review.pdf

⁹<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/stateofthenationsfostercarefullreport.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/stateofthenationsfostercarefullreport.pdf> page 17

¹²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/679320/Foster_Care_in_England_Review.pdf.

¹³<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/tfnstateofthenationssummaryreport2019singles.pdf>

¹⁴<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/combining-fostering-report-v5.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/becoming-foster-parent/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>

¹⁶https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/default/files/england_foster_care_allowances_survey_2019-20_3.pdf

¹⁷<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/stateofthenationsfostercarefullreport.pdf>

¹⁸

¹⁹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/340/340.pdf>

²⁰ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/340/340.pdf>

²¹ https://www.minimumstandards.org/fost_twentyone.html

²²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/629383/The_fostering_system_in_England_Evidence_review.pdf

²³ <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-02/State%20of%20the%20Nation%27s%20Foster%20Care%20Impact%20Report%202020.pdf>

²⁴ Ofsted (2019), *Fostering in England 2017 to 2018: main findings*, 31st January 2019. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-in-england-1-april-2017-to-31-march-2018/fostering-in-england-2017-to-2018-main-findings>

²⁵ Ofsted (2020), *Fostering in England 2019 to 2020: main findings*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2019-to-31-march-2020/fostering-in-england-2019-to-2020-main-findings#fostering-capacity>

²⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/629383/The_fostering_system_in_England_Evidence_review.pdf

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ McDermid, S., Baker, C., Lawson, D., & Holmes, L. (2016). *The evaluation of the mockingbird family model: Final evaluation report*.

²⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/287957/TSD_standards_guidance_for_supervisors.pdf

³⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/629383/The_fostering_system_in_England_Evidence_review.pdf

³¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/340/340.pdf>

³² <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/research/state-nations-foster-care-2019>

³³ Ibid

³⁴ <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/research/state-nations-foster-care-2019>

³⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/679320/Foster_Care_in_England_Review.pdf

³⁶ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/340/340.pdf>

³⁷ Population statistics drawn from:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>

³⁸ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/629383/The_fostering_system_in_England_Evidence_review.pdf

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/340/340.pdf>

⁴¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/629383/The_fostering_system_in_England_Evidence_review.pdf page 12

⁴² For example, see

https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/report/The_demographic_characteristics_of_foster_carers_in_the_UK_motivations_barriers_and_messages_for_recruitment_and_retention/9580280

⁴³ The Education Select Committee's inquiry into Fostering (December 2017)