

State of the Nations' Foster Care Full Report 2024



Contents

Foreword 3

Introduction 4

Part One: Starting Out 5

 Recruitment 5

 Application and approval 8

 The matching process 10

Part Two: Caring for Children 14

 Learning and development 14

 Family time 17

 Day-to-day decisions 18

 Status of foster carers 20

 Support for foster carers 25

 Support for children in foster care 28

 Allegations 30

 Finances 35

Part Three: Endings and Post-Foster Care 39

 Children moving on in foster care 39

 Post-foster care 42

 Keeping in touch 47

Part Four: The System 51

 Shortages of foster carers 51

 Retention 52

 Sufficiency planning 56

 Support care models 58

 Views and attitudes on fostering 59

Conclusion 63

About the Data 65

Foreword

Foster care is meant to provide safety and security for children and young people. But too often, children are being caught in a system that doesn't meet their needs.

There has been a growing crisis in foster care for a long time. Every year, hundreds more foster carers leave the role than join, while the number of children in care rises. Our latest State of the Nations survey tells a familiar story. As the sector continues to lose carers, many who remain are burnt out and struggling.

Foster carers take on a vital role. They show remarkable resilience in the face of mounting pressures from all directions. Yet as this report shows, many are at breaking point.

As a sector, we must act collaboratively and courageously to address the issues set out in this research. We must recognise foster carers as far more than small cogs in a system, and rather as the beating heart of the families they nurture. We must care for them, so they can care for our children.

This report comes as new policies take shape across the UK to reform children's social care. We will be lobbying hard to ensure all four governments deliver the change we need.

I want to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone who completed the survey and to the fostering community as a whole. You are the lifeblood of this system and without you, it would not exist.

I hope this research inspires you, as it has me, to reflect and act to ensure that every child in foster care has the opportunity to thrive. The challenges ahead are significant but this report sets out some of the steps we must take together.

Sarah Thomas
CEO, The Fostering Network

For almost 25 years, my wife, Sharon, and I have had the privilege of fostering many children, and we still have three young people living with us long-term, who are very much part of our family.

Fostering is at the centre of our lives, it is who we are as a family, and we are passionate about the difference it makes to children. Relationships define our role – with children, their families, our colleagues across the care sector, and the wider fostering community.

The 2024 State of the Nations' Foster Care report captures the lived experiences of foster carers like us across the UK. It shines a light on the power of fostering to change lives and doesn't shy away from the challenges that too often stand in the way.

Like many carers, we have experienced the worry of accepting a match when we know it isn't quite right – but the child has nowhere else to go. We've felt the frustration of having a child with us for years, but hearing nothing about them after they move on. And we've felt the guilt of going on holiday when someone has to be left behind because we couldn't get permission or a passport in time.

Fostering is one of the most rewarding things we do, but there is no doubt that the pressures in our system are making it more challenging. This report is not just a reflection of foster care in the UK today, but a call to action for governments and services.

To my fellow foster carers, I offer my deepest thanks. Thank you for being there for children who need you. Thank you for your resilience, your compassion, and your unshakeable belief in the potential of each and every child you have looked after, loved and supported.

Mervyn Erskine
Foster carer and chair of the board of trustees, The Fostering Network

Introduction

Over 100,000 children in the UK are looked after away from home, and around three quarters of these are in foster care. Foster families provide children with safe and loving homes when they need them, whether for one night or for many years.

The Fostering Network conducts the State of the Nations' Foster Care survey every three years to provide a reliable picture of the state of foster care across the UK, gathering evidence on what is working and what needs to change. It is the largest independent survey of the UK's fostering sector; the 2024 survey was completed by over 3,000 current and former foster carers and 114 fostering services.

As in previous years, the survey covers a wide range of issues in fostering and we are very grateful to everyone who took the time to share their views. This report presents the full findings from the 2024 survey and sets out our recommendations for governments, placing authorities and fostering services. A summary of the findings is available in the [summary report](#). While a foster carer's journey is not linear, both reports are structured to broadly reflect the path from initial recruitment up to the point of considering resigning or retiring.

Unfortunately, since our last report in 2021, we have seen existing pressures in the system grow, compounded by a cost of living crisis, demographic changes in the foster carer population, and the increasing challenges faced by children and young people today. Many of these findings make for difficult and dispiriting reading. However, we are also entering a period of opportunity with new legislation and policy developments forthcoming across the UK to improve children's social care.

We will use our findings to influence this work and continue pushing for wider change at both a national and a local level, to improve support for foster carers and deliver better outcomes for children and young people in foster care. We remain committed to working with services to improve their offer to foster carers, aiding both recruitment and retention.

Part One: Starting Out

Recruitment

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the number of children in care has been broadly increasing for the past two decades, while the number of foster carers is decreasing. In Scotland, the number of children in care is falling, but the number of foster carers is falling at a faster rate.

This means it is crucial across the whole of the UK that services are able to consistently recruit new foster carers, as well as retain the ones they already have. We have [estimated](#) that around 6,500 more foster families are needed across the UK to make sure every child receives the care they need and is well supported in their community.

Motivations to foster

People choose to foster for a range of reasons, but we found that these don't particularly vary between the four nations of the UK. We asked foster carers to select their motivations to foster from a list of options and **the most common motivation, selected by**

89% of foster carers in 2024, was to make a difference to the lives of children in care. This was also the top choice in 2021. The next most common motivations in 2024 were 'I want to offer children the opportunity to be part of my/ our family' (65%) and 'I enjoy working with children' (58%).

"It's the most worthwhile thing I've ever done. We are a fostering family and it's part of our world."

Attraction to foster for a particular service

We asked fostering services what they think most attracts people to foster for their service. The most common choices overall were the quality of support for foster carers (77%), looking after local children/ helping the community (65%), and training opportunities for foster carers (50%). In 2021, these were also the most common choices but each was selected by a higher proportion of respondents: 91%, 78% and 75% respectively.

Barriers to enquiring about fostering

We also asked fostering services what they consider to be the primary reasons preventing suitable applicants from enquiring to foster. The top reasons they gave were:

- **Finances (49%)** – a combination of the cost of living and the inadequacy of financial support for foster carers.
- **Perceptions** people have (39%) – about the fostering role, children in foster care (often due to media stereotypes), or their own suitability to foster.
- **A lack of space** in the home (31%) – sometimes attributed to people's own children leaving home later.

These findings are almost unchanged from 2021. While the top theme in 2021, that people are put off by the application process, didn't make the list this time, issues with the application process

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

did appear in responses to an additional question we asked this time about reasons preventing people from applying to foster following initial enquiry (see Application and approval).

Improving the recruitment process

We asked fostering services what, if anything, could improve the recruitment, assessment and approval process for foster carers. In their comments relating to recruitment (assessment and approval are discussed in the following section), respondents most frequently commented not on the process but on **conditions for foster carers (29%)**, arguing that better financial and other support for foster carers would encourage more people to come forward to the role. Following this, the next most common theme was the **visibility of fostering in society (23%)**, and the need to increase this through marketing and recruitment campaigns. Some specified that these should take place at a national level.

"Continued information sharing about how positive fostering can be for the children and for families. Some individuals believe that the experience would have a negative impact on their family."

Demographics of foster carers

The population of foster carers in the UK is ageing. Of those who responded to our survey in 2024, only 15% were aged 25-44, a slight decrease from 17% in 2021, while 27% were aged 45-54, down from 32%. In contrast, **the largest proportion of respondents (44%) were aged 55-64**, up from 41%, and a further 12% were aged 65-74, up from 10%. This creates sustainability issues as older foster carers retire and are not replaced by new recruits.

Other demographic features of the foster carer population appear almost unchanged since 2021. There remains a lack of ethnic and religious diversity in the foster carer population as the vast majority of our respondents in 2024 described themselves as **white (92%, as in 2021)**, and **Christian (57%, down from 58%)** or **not religious (39%, up from 38%)**. Only 1.9% of those surveyed in 2024 were Asian, compared to around 9% of the UK population, and only 1.5% were Muslim, compared to around 6% of the UK population. The proportion of respondents who were Black, African or Caribbean increased from 3.2% in 2021 to 3.7% in 2024 so now matches the UK population according to the latest census data.¹

Most foster carers responding to the survey were **women (82%, down from 84% in 2021)**, **heterosexual (94%, as in 2021)** and **married (72%, up from 71%)**.

¹ UK percentages calculated from the [England and Wales Census 2021](#), [Scotland Census 2022](#), and [Northern Ireland Census 2021](#).

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Fund national foster carer recruitment campaigns in each nation of the UK.
- Provide dedicated funding for foster carers to access suitably sized accommodation, including through home extensions and renovations, as in the Greater Manchester [Room Makers scheme](#).
- Create a duty on local authorities to consider the needs of foster families and care-experienced people within their housing sufficiency planning.

Governments and services should:

- Co-design recruitment campaigns with foster carers which:
 - Focus on outcomes for children, and emphasise the power of foster carers to make a difference to their lives.
 - Target underrepresented groups including Asian and Muslim communities.
 - Emphasise the support available to foster carers.
 - Tackle negative stereotypes about care-experienced children.
- Keep abreast of the latest research in fostering recruitment and retention and embed good practice, including from the Centre for Evidence and Implementation's [research](#) and our forthcoming toolkit.

Fostering services should:

- Promote and be fully transparent about their service's specific support offer for prospective applicants and foster carers.

See Part Two for specific recommendations on improving support and remuneration for foster carers.

Application and approval

Barriers to applying to foster

In addition to the question on barriers to enquiring about fostering, in our 2024 survey we also asked fostering services about the reasons preventing suitable applicants from continuing the application process following initial enquiry. The top themes in response to this question were:

- Prospective applicants gaining a **greater understanding** of the fostering role (38%), having not previously realised the demands or commitment involved.
- Aspects of the **assessment process** (35%), particularly its length and intrusiveness.
- **Finances** (26%) – as discussed above, a combination of the cost of living and the inadequacy of financial support for foster carers.
- Considerations around prospective applicants' own **family** (23%), including the potential impact of fostering on their own children, or other caring responsibilities.

These findings suggest that some of the drop-off from initial enquiry to application may be unavoidable and perhaps even positive, as prospective applicants learn more about the role and ultimately realise that fostering isn't right for them at this time.

However, issues around the assessment and approval process can and should be addressed to improve the conversion from enquiry to application. The length of the process is a longstanding issue for fostering services, so in this year's survey, we asked them an additional question on this.

"The intrusion of the process, especially in relation to previous partner checks, medical information etc. Time constraints and the length of the process and taking time off work to accommodate assessment sessions/visits."

Length of the approval process

Over half of services in England (55%) and Wales (62%) said the approval process (from enquiry to approval) takes under six months, compared to one of two services in Northern Ireland (50%) and a third in Scotland (33%). The remaining services said the process takes six to twelve months.

104 fostering services provided comments about issues which mean the foster carer assessment and approval process takes longer than intended in their service. Of these, 16% said they experienced no issues. Among the services that did experience issues, the key themes were:

- delays in **applicant checks** (52%), including medical checks and DBS checks
- **social worker capacity** and availability (39%)
- reasons relating to **the applicant** (17%), including availability and illness.

"Medicals are becoming an issue with GPs not prioritising these and in some cases refusing to complete them."

Improving the assessment and approval process

Accordingly, in responses to our question on what could improve the recruitment, assessment and approval process for foster carers, the top theme relating to assessment and approval was the need for **quicker and more efficient assessments**, particularly with regard to checks from partners in health, justice and other agencies. This is similar to the top theme in 2021: “wider support and awareness from partner agencies (health and criminal record checks etc.) about the need for information to avoid delays”. The other themes in 2021 were: better transfer processes for people who have already been approved to foster; more staff to complete assessments; general awareness raising of the role of a foster carer so applicants have clearer expectations; and better pre-approval training. These themes all appeared this time too, although in smaller numbers.

Temporary approval of connected persons

We asked services operating in England and Wales whether they think there is clear guidance about the implementation of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations. These allow for temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer for 16 weeks, with the possibility for an extension for up to 8 weeks. **Just over half of services (55%) agreed that there is clear guidance** on the regulations.

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Ensure foster carer medicals are added to the contract for General Practitioners across the UK in line with regulatory requirements on fostering services.
- Address sufficiency issues within children and families social work teams, prioritising and financing targeted social work recruitment and regulation of caseloads, to ensure foster carer assessments are conducted in line with best practice on caseload management.
- Review regulations in relation to the assessment process to ensure appropriate timescales, including through increased staffing in partner agencies, and increased digitisation.
- Update guidance on the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations.

The matching process

Good matching is key to ensuring children are looked after by foster carers who can meet their needs, close to home and with their siblings where appropriate. This helps avoid unplanned moves and increases stability for children.

In 2024, 56% of foster carers said they have had a new match with a child or young person in foster care in the past 24 months, ranging from 47% in Northern Ireland to 50% in Scotland and 57% in both England and Wales.

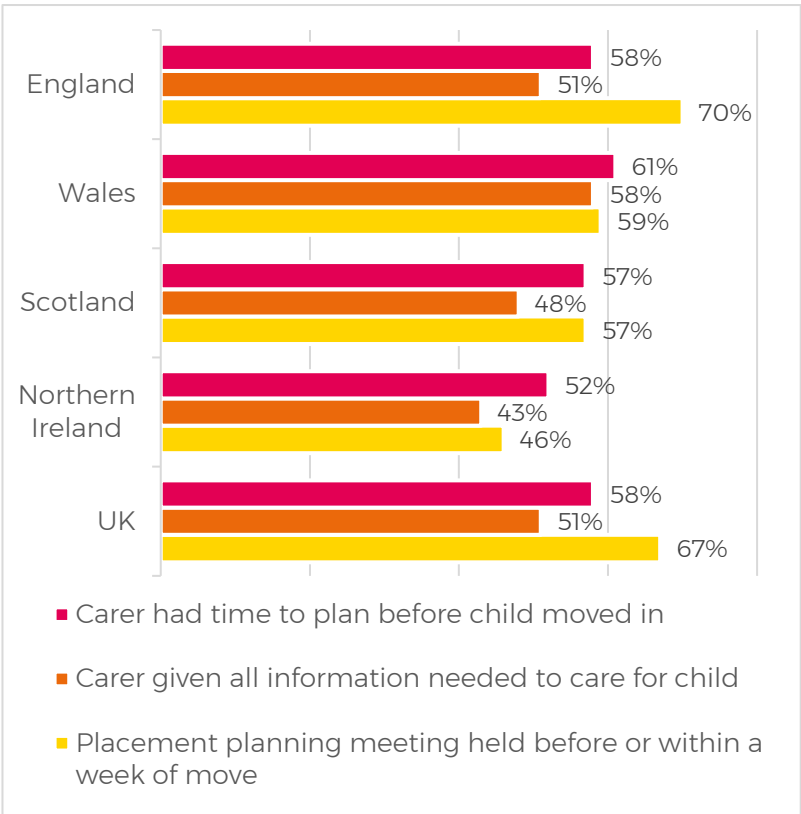
Matching decisions

Just over half (56%) of fostering services said they always or usually receive all the information required from children’s social workers to inform the matching process. Only two in five (40%) said they seek the child’s previous foster carers’ views to feed into the matching process, or request these if the carer is with another service. Less than two thirds (63%) said they record the above information in a matching document.

Planning

Of foster carers who have had a new match in the past 24 months, **three in five (58%) felt they had time to plan** before the child they were most recently matched with moved in. This has decreased considerably from 83% in 2021.

Around half (51%) felt they were given all the information they needed to care for the child, down from 55% in 2021. Two thirds (67%) said the placement planning meeting was held before or within a week of the child moving in (in 2021 we asked if the placement planning meeting was held within an appropriate time, so findings are not comparable).



Location and relationships

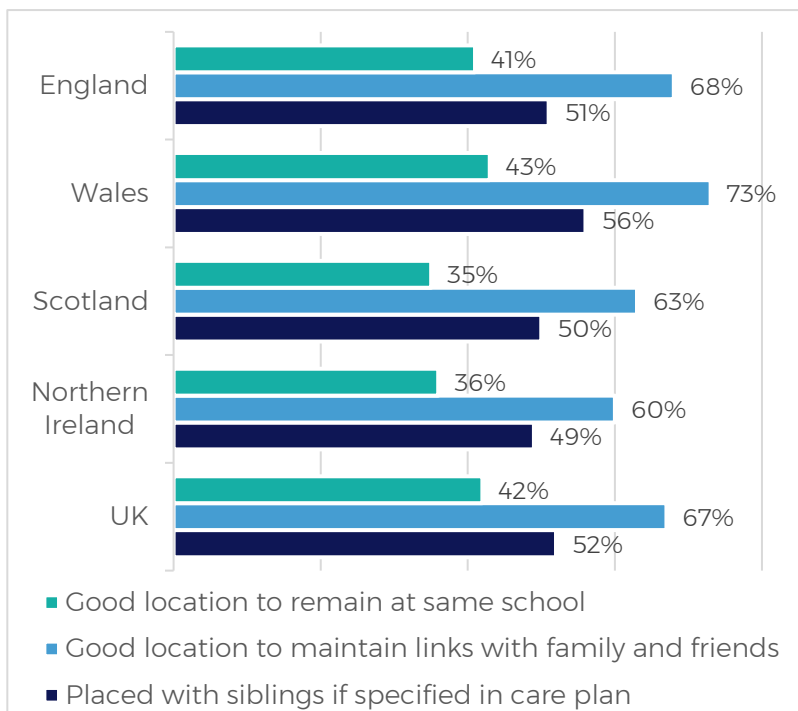
We asked foster carers to specify how far the children they foster have moved, if at all, from the local authority where they lived before they came into care. According to our respondents, **71% of children they foster were living in the same local authority or trust area** they lived in immediately before they came into care, while a quarter (23%) were living in a different local authority or trust area, but in the same nation of the UK. 1.1% were living in a different nation of the UK from before.

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

These figures varied considerably across the UK. Children in England were slightly more likely and those in Wales considerably more likely than those elsewhere to be living in the same local authority; children in Scotland were slightly more likely to be living in a different local authority; and children in Northern Ireland were more likely to have moved from a different nation of the UK.

Beyond these geographical boundaries, only around **two in five foster carers (42%)** felt their latest match was in a **good location for the child to remain at the same school**, falling to just over a third in Scotland and Northern Ireland. In comparison, **two thirds of foster carers (67%)** said the match was in a **good location for the child to maintain links with family and friends**. In 2021 we asked this as a combined question and 80% of respondents selected yes.

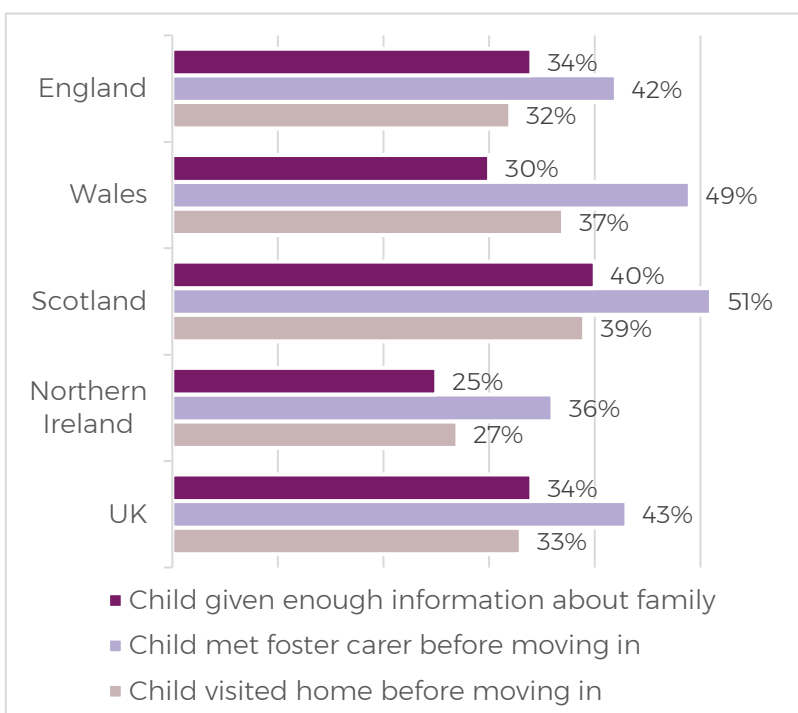
In most cases, foster carers selected 'not applicable' when asked if the child was able to be placed with their siblings if specified in their care plan – suggesting that either children didn't have siblings or that their care plan didn't specify that they should stay together. Excluding N/A responses, **around half (52%)** said the child was able to be placed with their siblings.



Preparing children for new matches and moves

About a **third of foster carers (34%)** felt the child was given enough **information** about the foster family before coming to live with them. This was higher in Scotland (40%) and lower in Northern Ireland (25%).

Two in five (43%) said the child was able to meet them. A **third (33%)** said the child was able to visit their home before moving in. This has decreased considerably from 2021, when 48% said the child was able to visit before moving in.



Vacancies

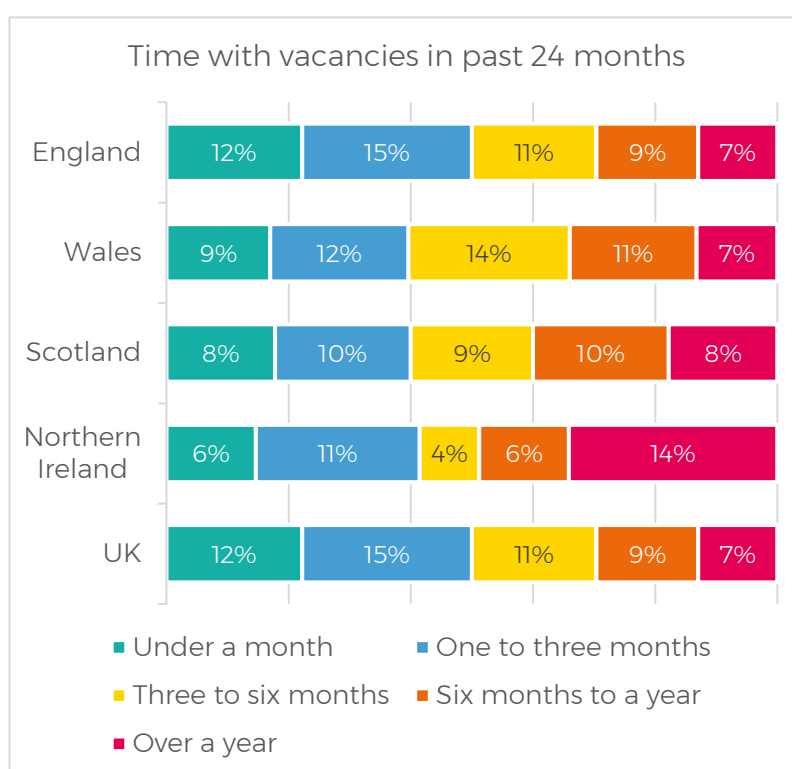
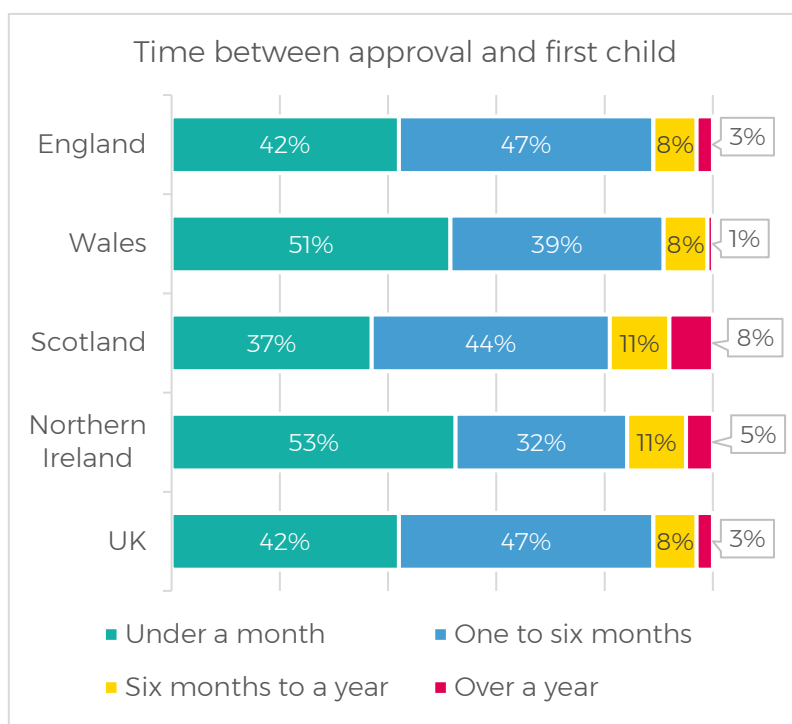
We asked foster carers who were approved within the last five years how long they waited from initial approval until they fostered their first child. Foster carers in Scotland tended to wait the longest, followed by those in England.

We also asked all foster carers how many of the past 24 months they have spent with an unfilled space for a child in foster care (a 'vacancy'). Foster carers in Northern Ireland were more likely to say they have not had a vacancy in the past 24 months (59%) than those in England (47%), Wales (47%), Scotland (53%), or the UK overall (48%), but they were also more likely to have had a vacancy for over a year.

The most common reason foster carers gave for having experienced a vacancy in the past 24 months was simply that they were **waiting for a suitable match**. This points to the need for improved matching processes and for foster carers to have the right training and support to allow them to be matched with children with a wider range of needs.

Following this, the next most common reason was foster carers' own circumstances, primarily **needing a break**, or due to their **health** or **housing** situation (moving house, redecorating or having renovations). Others referred to the **needs of children** they currently look after, including fostered, adopted and birth children, meaning they can't foster another child or have more specific matching criteria.

We asked fostering services whether they have experienced any issues meaning foster carers are spending longer without children in placement. Of 110 written comments, 45% said they have not experienced any such issues. Among those who have experienced issues, the most common themes were:



"Young person moved to independence and I wasn't ready for a new child. I wanted a breather and the right match."

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

- **Practical reasons** relating to the foster carer (**37%**) – including that they are going through a practice concern or allegation, or that they aren't appropriate for a particular child, for example due to geography, capacity, or skillset.
- **Foster carers' preferences** (**33%**) – including around the age or needs of children.
- The need for **good matching** (**20%**).
- **Children's needs** (**18%**) – including other children in the fostering household.
- **Delays in fostering service processes** (**17%**).
- **Foster carers' needs** (**15%**) – particularly the need for rest.

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Fund national recruitment campaigns to increase the pool of available carers and enable children to stay close to home.
- Introduce a national register of foster carers in each nation of the UK to support matching of foster carers and children (see Status).
- Accelerate work in Scotland to implement the duty to keep children with their siblings where appropriate, and create a similar duty in the other UK nations.
- Lead on the creation of standardised tools for capturing data about children and their needs to assist with consistent, high quality matching.

Placing authorities should:

- Ensure children's profile information is of high quality and is informed by everyone who knows them best, including those who are currently caring for the child, and the child themselves. Ensure this is shared with fostering services when requesting a foster family.

Placing authorities and fostering services should:

- Provide joint training for all staff to understand their respective roles in achieving good quality matching practice.

Fostering services should:

- Record all the information gathered about children in a matching document and ensure this is shared with potential carers well in advance of any moves.
- Increase capacity to ensure planning meetings are held before children move in with their new foster families.
- Many foster families already create 'about us' information packs to show children when they move in. Support this as standard practice and ensure these are shared ahead of the child's move, not just once they have arrived. Enable carers to meet children before they move in.

Part Two: Caring for Children

Learning and development

Foster carers are entrusted with the care of children who have often experienced significant trauma and adversity, both through the circumstances leading up to them coming into care, as well as the experience of being removed from their families. It is therefore crucial that foster carers are appropriately trained and able to provide trauma-informed and child-centred care to help children develop and thrive. This includes preparatory training before a foster carer is approved and regular ongoing training tailored to their learning needs once approved. This should be set out in an agreed learning and development (L&D) plan.

Learning and development plans

However, in 2024, only 53% of foster carers said they have an agreed learning and development plan for the next 12 months – down from 65% in 2021. This varied across the UK, from 40% in Northern Ireland, to 52% in Scotland, 64% in Wales, and 72% in England.

Just over half of foster carers have an agreed annual L&D plan, down from two thirds in 2021.

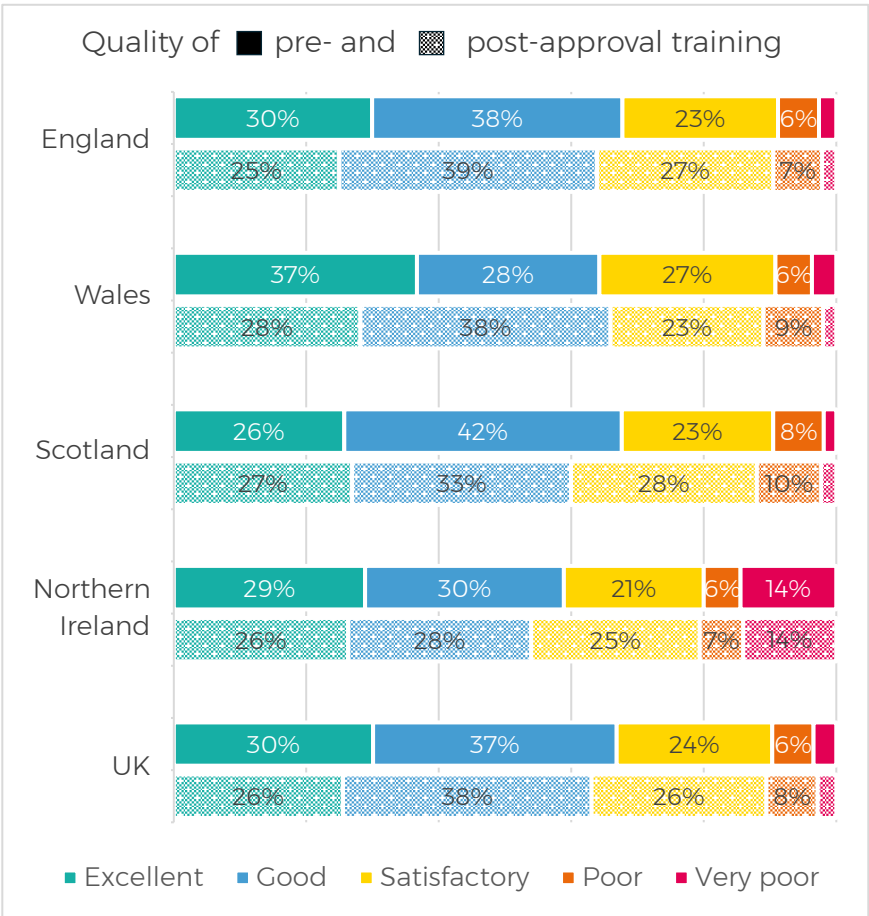
Quality of learning and development

We asked foster carers approved within the last five years how they would rate the quality of learning and development offered to them pre-approval. **Two thirds (67%) rated their pre-approval training as excellent or good.**

In comparison, **63% rated their post-approval training as excellent or good.** This has decreased considerably from 2021, when 71% of foster carers we surveyed rated their L&D (overall) as excellent or good.

Training offered and received

We also asked foster carers about the training they have received, and fostering services about the training they have offered, in the past 24 months. The most common areas of training selected by both groups – around 60% of



State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

foster carers and 90% of fostering services – were **trauma-informed/ therapeutic parenting, challenging behaviour, and child sexual abuse or exploitation**.

Almost half of foster carers said they have received training on **allegations**, falling to a third in Scotland and a fifth in Northern Ireland. This compares to an average of 90% of services that said they have offered it. Additionally, almost half of foster carers said they have received training on **children's mental health**, compared to three quarters of services that said they have offered it.

Two thirds of services also said they have offered training on caring for children from **different ethnic, religious and/or cultural backgrounds**, whereas just over a third of foster carers said they have received this.

Training wanted

The above findings indicate a clear gap between the training services offer and what foster carers receive. This may be partly explained by responses to our question on training foster carers would like to receive but cannot access; the most common theme related to the **timing, format or level of training (45%)** rather than its content, suggesting that services may be offering training but it is not always suitable for carers.

Respondents wanted training to be more accessible, flexible, and available in a mixture of face to face and online formats. They often requested more advanced training or to be able to gain a qualification.

In terms of specific areas of training foster carers said they want, these most often related to **children's needs (43%)**, as in our 2021 survey, and included the following:

- **Therapeutic care**, including attachment, trauma-informed care and life story work.
- **Safeguarding**, particularly around drugs and alcohol and internet safety.
- **Mental health**, particularly trauma.
- **Neurodiversity**, including foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, autism and ADHD.
- **Health and disability**, including alcohol and drug withdrawal in babies.
- **Equality, diversity and inclusion**, including caring for LGBTQ+ children and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- **Communication needs**, including sign language.

Other areas of training foster carers requested were related to:

- **Navigating systems**, including finances, the education system, court processes, documentation and forms, policies and standards, accessing services and support.
- Different aspects of **managing the fostering role** such as dealing with allegations, managing their own wellbeing, and foster carers' rights.
- Training specific to certain **ages and stages of children**, such as transition planning, and caring for teenagers or babies.

"I would like to go back to face to face training because it gives you time to speak with other carers"

"The courses are not the problem, it's accessing them. Having pre-school children in the house means we can't attend training during school hours. Courses always conflict with contact schedules too."

"I did my own private training on therapeutic parenting. It would be good to have funding provided for extra external training as needed about needs specific to the individual (e.g. eating disorders)."

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

- **Children's behaviour**, including challenging behaviour, and techniques to manage behaviour.

Accordingly, fostering services were asked to list any areas of training they would have liked to provide for foster carers in the last 12 months but have not been able to. Like foster carers, their comments most often related to children's needs, prioritising therapeutic care; equality, diversity and inclusion; neurodiversity; and mental health.

Following these, the next most common themes were managing the fostering role; children's behaviour; ages and stages of children; features of training; and navigating systems. This suggests that fostering services may not be aware of the demand for training on navigating systems or potentially for different features of training.

Views on standardising training

Training for foster carers can vary between different services and in different parts of the UK. We asked foster carers and fostering services whether they think there should be a standardised accredited framework for the training of foster carers, which sets out a minimum level of training all foster carers should receive. Almost three quarters of foster carers (72%) and fostering services (73%) agreed that this should be the case for both pre- and post-approval training.

For foster carers, this ranged from 64% in Northern Ireland, to 69% in Scotland, 72% in Wales, and 74% in England. For services, this ranged from 50% (one of two responses) in Northern Ireland, to 72% in Scotland, 74% in England and 77% in Wales.

Three quarters of foster carers and fostering services think there should be a standardised accredited framework for pre- and post-approval training.

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Invest in the creation, implementation and monitoring of a standardised accredited framework for pre- and post-approval training for foster carers in each nation of the UK, including opportunities for foster carers to gain qualifications.

Fostering services should:

- Ensure all foster carers have an agreed annual learning and development plan.
- Provide training in a range of formats and at different times to increase attendance, focusing particularly on increasing uptake of training on trauma-informed care.
- Provide regular opportunities for more advanced, specialist training, tailored to foster carers' skills, experience and the needs of the children they care for.

Family time

Most children in foster care have birth family who they can't live with but may be able to visit or spend time with. This can include parents, siblings and extended family.

A key part of the foster carer's role is often to support children to see these family members. Around a third of foster carers told us they manage this independently (33%) or alongside a social worker (32%), while 36% said they provide transportation only. A fifth (19%) said they aren't involved in managing family time, and 13% said the children they foster don't have time with their birth family.

Family time can be emotional for everyone involved, so foster carers should have the right support to enable them to look after children before, during (where applicable) and after this time. However, we found that less than two thirds (63%) of foster carers always or usually feel supported by their service in relation to family time for the children they foster. This was lower in Northern Ireland (53%), similar in England (63%) and Scotland (65%), and higher in Wales (69%). On average in the UK, this figure has improved slightly from 61% in 2021.

Less than two thirds of foster carers said they feel supported by their service in relation to family time.

Three in five foster carers said they feel that current arrangements for family time are in the best interests of the children they foster.

"The baby is very dysregulated after every family time, I do not feel the child's needs have ever been met in relation to this. It has only been adult led."

Additionally, only 60% said they feel that current arrangements for family time are in the best interests of the children they foster. This could mean whether family time happens but also where, when or how often. This was similar in England (60%), Scotland (61%) and Northern Ireland (62%) and higher in Wales (67%).

Recommendations

Children's social care services and fostering services should:

- Ensure children and young people's views are heard on the people who are important to them and with whom they want to keep connected.
- Ensure foster carers feel well equipped to manage family time and have the support they need – including any emotional support, funding for activities, training, and peer support.
- Listen to foster carers if they share that arrangements for family time are not in children's best interests. Improve recording and communication between partners to ensure these views are considered by courts/ hearings making decisions about family time.

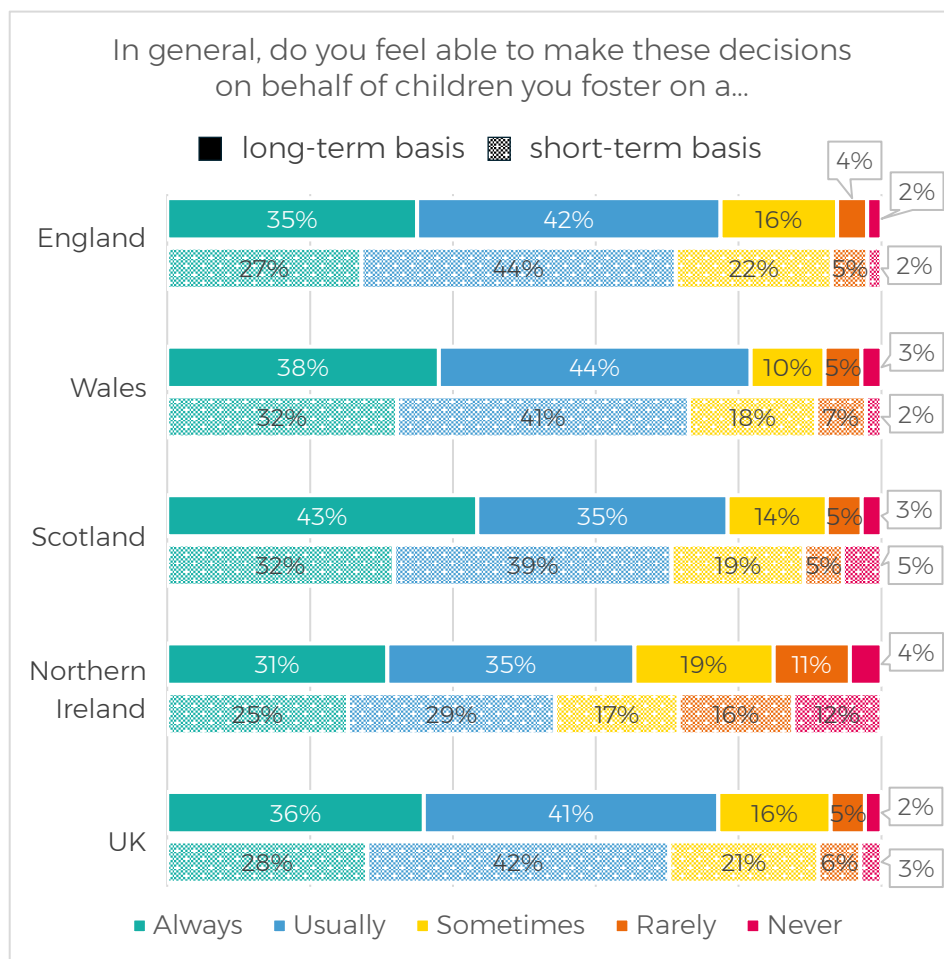
Day-to-day decisions

Children and young people in foster care should have the same opportunities as their peers – but foster carers don't always have the authority to make the decisions required for them to access these opportunities, or to give them permission to do so.

Less than a third (31%) of foster carers said children's social workers are always clear about which decisions they have the authority to make in relation to the children they foster, ranging from 34% in Wales, to 31% in both England and Scotland, falling to only a quarter in Northern Ireland (26%).

Foster carers said they generally feel **more able to make these decisions in relation to children they foster long-term** (36% said they always feel able to) than those they foster short-term (28% always feel able to). This has decreased since 2021, from 42% for children fostered on a long-term basis, and 39% for those fostered on a short-term basis.

Only half of foster carers in England (48%), Wales (53%) and Scotland (50%) said that, if they have not been given the authority to make decisions on certain matters, they feel that social workers always or usually respond to requests for decisions in a timely manner. This was lower in Northern Ireland (42%). In the UK as a whole, this has fallen from 55% in 2021 to 48% in 2024.



Less than half of foster carers said social workers respond to requests for decisions in a timely manner.

Barriers to decision-making

When asked about the main barriers they face in making decisions for children in their care, the most common themes were:

- **Difficulties with social workers' involvement (31%)**, including a lack of communication, clarity and information; long waits for decisions; and not feeling listened to.

"Everything has to be run by my social worker first, who then has to discuss with child's social worker, then has to be discussed with managers and then time for them to implement the action depending on their diary availability."

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

- **Lacking consent from birth family (15%).**
- **Bureaucracy (7%)** – unnecessary paperwork, box-ticking and complicated processes.
- **Children and young people themselves (6%).**
- **Conflicting interests (4%).**

Difficult decisions

We asked foster carers what sorts of day-to-day decisions they feel are the most difficult for them to make in relation to the children they foster. The most common areas they mentioned related to **social opportunities** (17%), including sleepovers and activities; **healthcare** (15%), including routine appointments and vaccinations; **family time** (12%); **childhood experiences** (12%) such as holidays and trips; children's **education** (11%); aspects of children's **self-expression** (10%) such as haircuts; and typical 'parenting' **decisions** (10%) such as technology use.



Recommendations

Governments should:

- Introduce statutory 'opt-out' maximum delegated authority for foster carers to make day-to-day decisions on behalf of the children and young people they foster.

Fostering services should:

- Include detail on day-to-day decisions in care planning, so that all parties are clear on which decisions foster carers can or cannot make on behalf of a child and they don't have to seek approval from social workers as frequently.

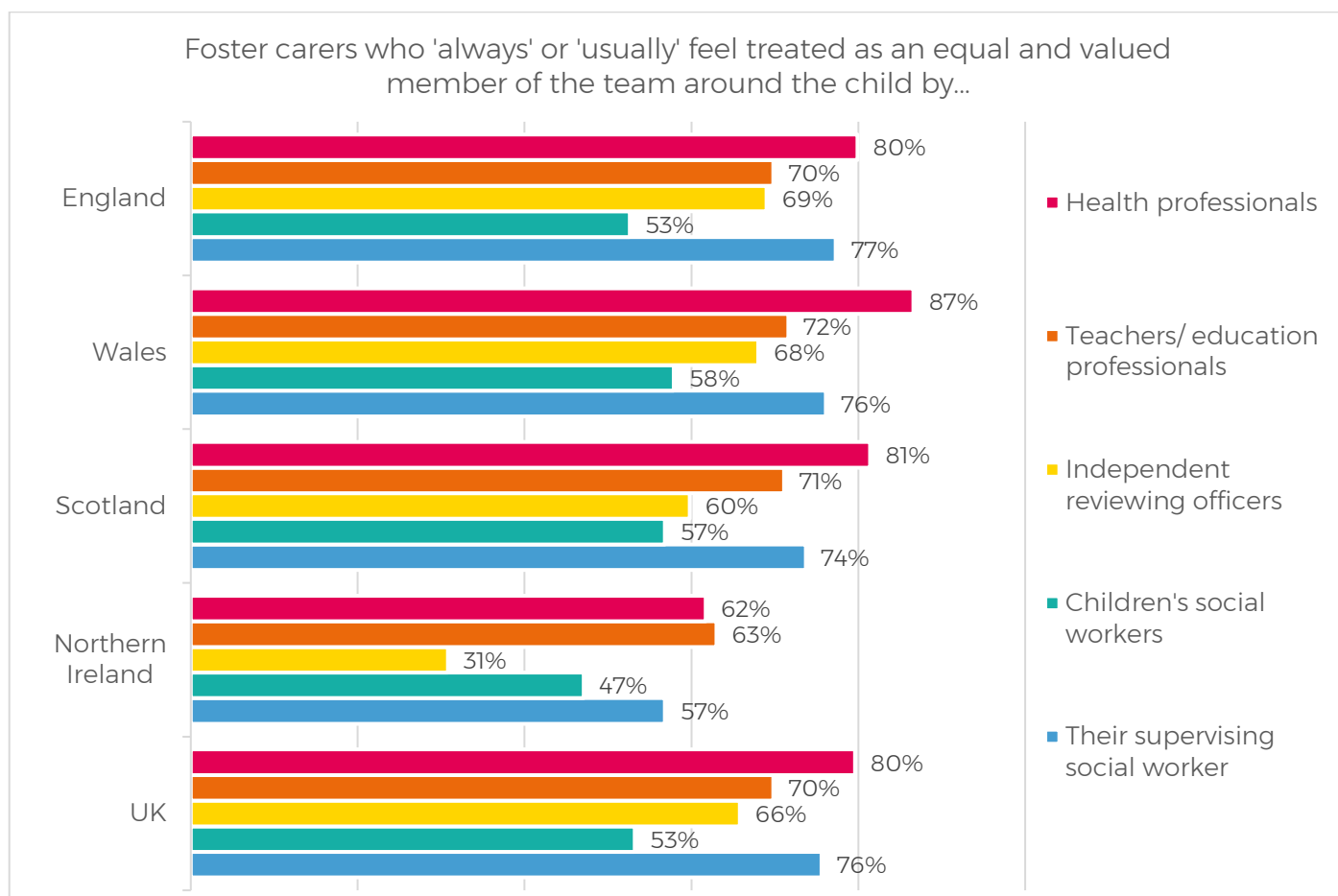
Status of foster carers

Foster carers play a vital role in the lives of the children and young people they look after, but they aren't always recognised or valued for this. This section looks at foster carers' status and treatment by other professionals, and how these could be improved.

Treatment by other professionals

We asked foster carers whether they generally feel treated as an equal and valued member of the team around the child by other members of the team. Respondents were most likely to answer 'always' or 'usually' in relation to health professionals, followed by supervising social workers, and least likely in relation to children's social workers. Self-perceived status was consistently lower among respondents in Northern Ireland.

Since 2021, the proportion of foster carers saying they always or usually feel treated as an equal and valued member of the team by others has increased very slightly for health professionals (from 79% to 80%) but fallen slightly for teachers/ education professionals (from 72% to 70%), and decreased further for children's social workers (from 57% to 53%) and supervising social workers (from 80% to 76%). This is the first time we have asked about treatment by independent reviewing officers (IROs); around two thirds said they feel IROs always or usually treat them as an equal and valued member of the team.



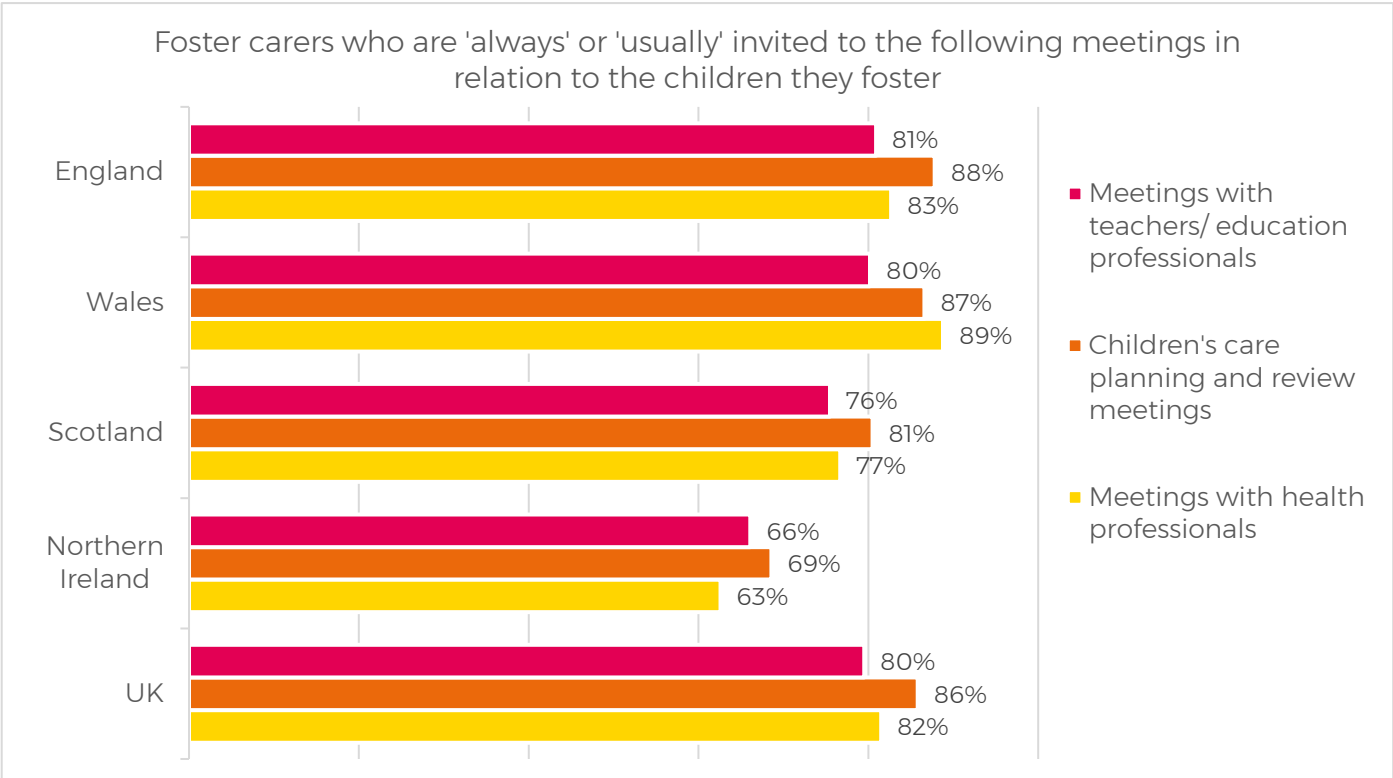
State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

Last time we conducted this survey, we asked how often foster carers attend various meetings about the children they look after. In 2024 we amended this to ask how often they are **invited**, ensuring we are focusing specifically on the extent to which foster carers are included by other professionals.

In 2021, 92% of respondents said they always or usually attend meetings about children’s education and/or employment, and the same proportion said they attend meetings about children’s health. Yet in 2024, only 80% said they are always or usually invited to meetings with teachers/ education professionals, and 82% to meetings with health professionals.

Furthermore, while 89% of respondents in 2021 said they attend children’s care planning and review meetings, only 86% said they are invited to these meetings in 2024.

This suggests that foster carers’ inclusion in meetings has worsened since 2021.



Foster carers' charters

A foster carers’ charter is a written document which sets out what foster carers, fostering services and placing authorities can expect from each other and aims to encourage best practice by all parties. The Fostering Network has a [charter](#) which we encourage fostering services to adapt and sign up to, showing their commitment to working in partnership in the best interests of children in care.

42% of foster carers said their service has a foster carers’ charter, down from 46% in 2021. 4% said their service doesn’t have a charter, up from 2% in 2021, and over half (54%) said they don’t know, up from 52%.

Over half of foster carers don’t know if their service has a foster carers’ charter.

In comparison, 61% of fostering services said they have a foster carers’ charter, up slightly from 58% in 2021. A fifth (22%) said they don’t have a charter, down from a third (33%), and 17% said they don’t know if they do, up from 10%.

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

Over a third (36%) of fostering services said their charter was last updated within the last year, while 29% said it was last updated one to two years ago. A quarter said it was updated more than two years ago and one in ten said they don't know. This is an improvement from 2021, when under a fifth (18%) of services said their charter was updated within the last year, 39% said it was updated one to two years ago, 35% more than two years ago, and 8% didn't know.

When asked which parties have signed up to the charter to show strategic commitment and understanding, **over four fifths (83%) of services said the head of their fostering service has signed up**, an increase from three quarters (76%) in 2021. Just over half (54%) said their director of children's services has signed up, up from 37% in 2021, while 48% said foster carer representatives have signed up (the same as in 2021) and 41% said councillors have (up from 15%).

Despite what appears to be an increase in how often foster carers' charters are updated and how many parties commit to them on paper, perceptions of their effectiveness are lower in 2024 than they were in 2021. Just one fifth of services in 2024 felt that their charter has increased foster carers' status, down from just under a quarter (24%) in 2021.

Interestingly, however, we also found that **foster carers whose service had a foster carers' charter were significantly more likely to say they always or usually feel treated as an equal and valued member of the team around the child by their supervising social worker (84%)** than those whose service did not have a charter (35%). Accordingly, they were significantly more likely to rate support from their SSW as excellent or good (83%) than those without a charter (39%), and to rate support from their fostering service in general in this way (64%, compared to 25%).

Additionally, **foster carers whose service had a charter were significantly less likely to be considering resigning from fostering (11%)** than those whose service did not have a charter (39%), and significantly more likely to say they have never considered resigning (44%) than those whose service did not have a charter (12%).

It may be that services are underestimating the impact of charters, or simply that those that better support and value their carers are more likely to have a foster carer charter – and for their carers to know about this – in the first place. In any case, charters can be a powerful reflection of services' commitment to their carers, and the relationship with foster carer support, status and retention are undeniable.

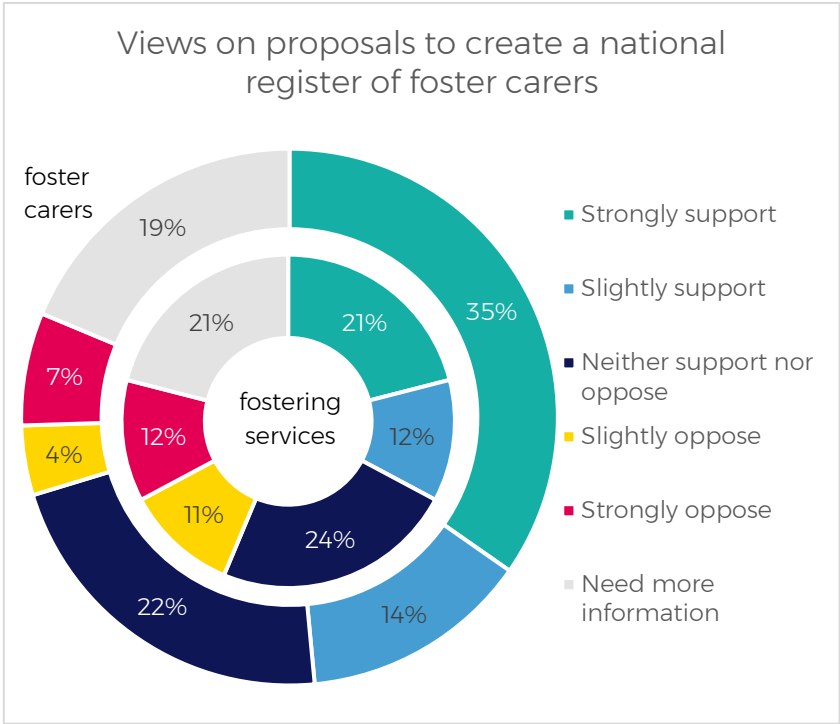
Proposals to create a national register of foster carers

The Fostering Network has been campaigning for a national register of foster carers, similar to the registers that already exist for other parts of the children's social care sector, for several years. As explained in this question of the survey, the register would be hosted by a central registration body, which would not be responsible for initial assessment and approval but would set standards for registration and have the final say over a foster carer's continued suitability to foster. We believe this would benefit foster carers' status, as well as improving safeguarding for children, matching, and sufficiency planning.

State of the Nations’ Foster Care 2024

In responses to this question, **almost half (49%) of foster carers said they strongly or slightly support proposals to create a national register**, while 22% were neutral and 19% said they need more information. One in ten (11%) said they oppose the idea. Support for a register was highest in Scotland (54%) and lowest in Northern Ireland (37%).

Fostering services were less supportive of proposals to create a national register than foster carers, but were still more likely to support the idea (33%) than oppose it (23%).



Protections and rights for foster carers

We asked foster carers and fostering services what protections and rights they feel foster carers have. **Over a third (34%) of foster carers said they have no protections or rights**, and a quarter (28%) said they don’t have many. In contrast, only 1% of fostering services said foster carers have no protections or rights, but 42% said they don’t have many.

The view that foster carers are protected by policies and procedures, common among fostering services, didn’t appear to resonate with foster carers. Instead, they often referred to the actions they take to protect themselves, such as practicing safer caring and making detailed records.

Over a third of foster carers said they don't feel they have any protections or rights, while only 1% of services said the same of foster carers.

“We should be treated with respect and as equals because we know the children and spend more time with the children than all the professionals.”

We then asked what protections and rights foster carers should have. The top themes were:

Foster carers: What protections and rights do you feel you should have as a foster carer?	Fostering services: What protections and rights do you feel foster carers should have?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conditions/ treatment (32%), including being treated as professionals, having a voice, being protected from harm, respected and valued, and kept informed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conditions/treatment (28%), including being treated as professionals, respected, protected from harm, kept informed, and having a voice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rights and protections around allegations (20%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support (21%), including advice, legal support and counselling.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial remuneration (19%), including pensions and fair pay.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial remuneration (20%), including pensions and retainer fees.

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

As shown, the conditions and treatment of foster carers were the top priority for both groups. Carers and services also placed a similar level of emphasis on financial remuneration. However, foster carers prioritised rights and protections around allegations more than services did, and services prioritised support for foster carers more than carers did.

"I feel that we should have access to the local government pension scheme. I'm considered 'part of the team' but have absolutely no financial stability now, in the future or in old age."

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Introduce a register of foster carers in each nation to increase foster carers' status and support matching of children with foster carers. Move responsibility for decisions about the removal of foster carers' approval to this body to increase independence.
- Introduce and fund a national pension scheme for foster carers of working age.
- Introduce a national minimum fee framework (see Finances).

Fostering services should:

- Ensure foster carers are invited to and supported at care planning and review meetings, and communicate with colleagues in universal services to emphasise the importance of including foster carers in meetings about children they foster.
- Introduce a foster carers' charter, updated annually and signed by all relevant parties, and increase awareness of this across the service.
- Ensure all foster carers are offered independent representation and advocacy when subject to an allegation, concern or complaint, and when making a complaint against a member of staff (see Allegations).

Support for foster carers

Fostering is incredibly rewarding, but it can also be challenging. From the anxiety and anticipation a carer feels when a child first steps over the threshold of their home, to the grief they may experience when a child moves on, and everything in between – all foster carers need a range of support to enable them to provide the best possible care for the children they look after, while maintaining their own wellbeing.

This section looks at foster carers' experiences of formal and informal support. It also compares the experiences of foster carers who are part of the Mockingbird programme with those who are not. Mockingbird, delivered by The Fostering Network in the UK, is an evidence-based model of foster care structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families, supporting them to build a resilient and caring community. In 2024, our survey was completed by 203 Mockingbird foster carers across the UK.

Support from services

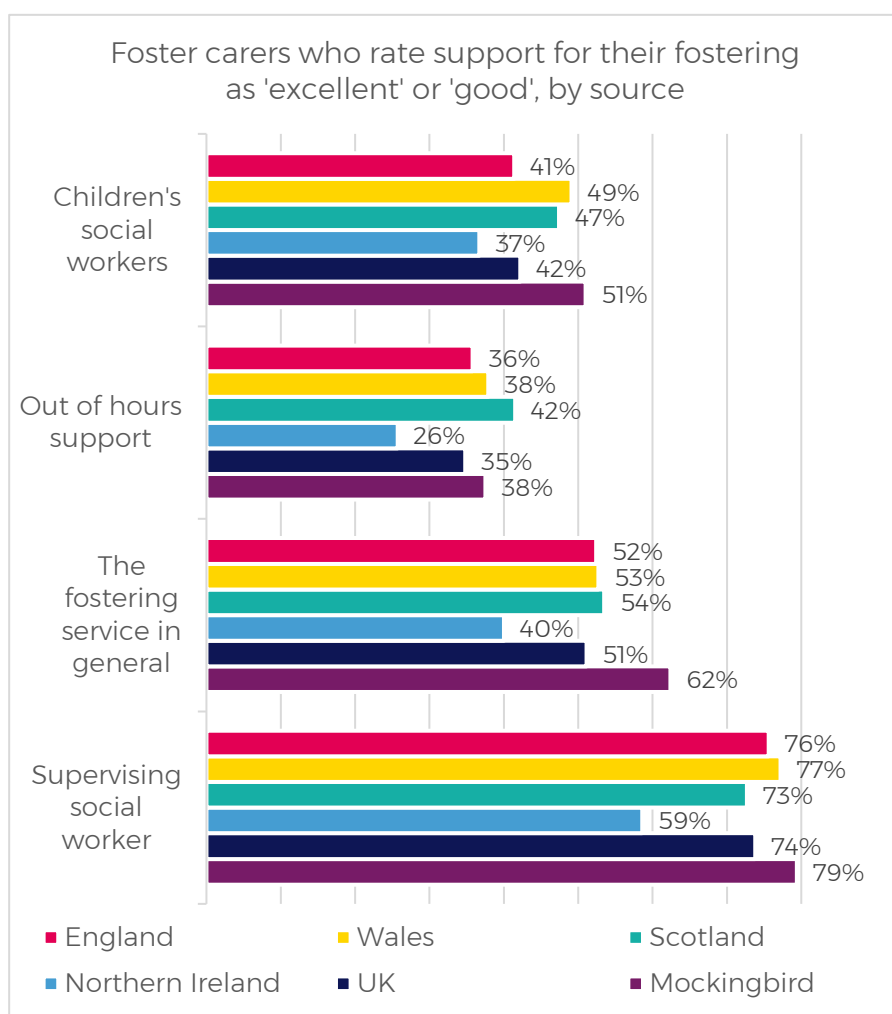
Legally, all foster carers must be allocated a supervising social worker (SSW). In 2024, 96% of foster carers surveyed across the UK said they have a named SSW. However, this fell to only 80% in Northern Ireland, compared to 96% in Wales, and 97% in England and Scotland.

The average number of SSWs foster carers said they have had in the past 24 months was 2.2. **Only 44% said they have had one consistent SSW in the past 24 months**, while 28% have had two, and 15% have had three. Turnover was higher in Northern Ireland and slightly lower in Scotland.

Despite this, **support from supervising social workers was rated the most highly** of all the

sources of support. This is relatively unchanged since 2021, when 75% of foster carers rated support from their SSW as excellent or good.

In contrast, **out of hours support was rated the least highly**. The proportion of foster carers who considered it to be excellent or good fell from 43% in 2021 to 35% in 2024. The proportion who



State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

rated support from fostering services in general as excellent or good also fell slightly, from 53% to 51%, and excellent/good ratings for support from children's social workers fell from 45% to 42%.

We asked fostering services what out of hours support they provide. Most said they have an emergency duty team made up of central local authority staff (59%), or a fostering specific support line operated by fostering service staff (58%). A fifth (19%) said support is provided by the foster carer's own SSW, and 6% said it is provided through a fostering specific support line operated by foster carers. Responses were similar across the UK.

Support from other foster carers

Of all sources of support (including those discussed above), **support from other foster carers was rated the second most highly**, with 69% considering it excellent or good. This is a slight increase from 65% in 2021. Just over half (53%) of foster carers rated support groups as such, suggesting that there is particular value to informal peer support.

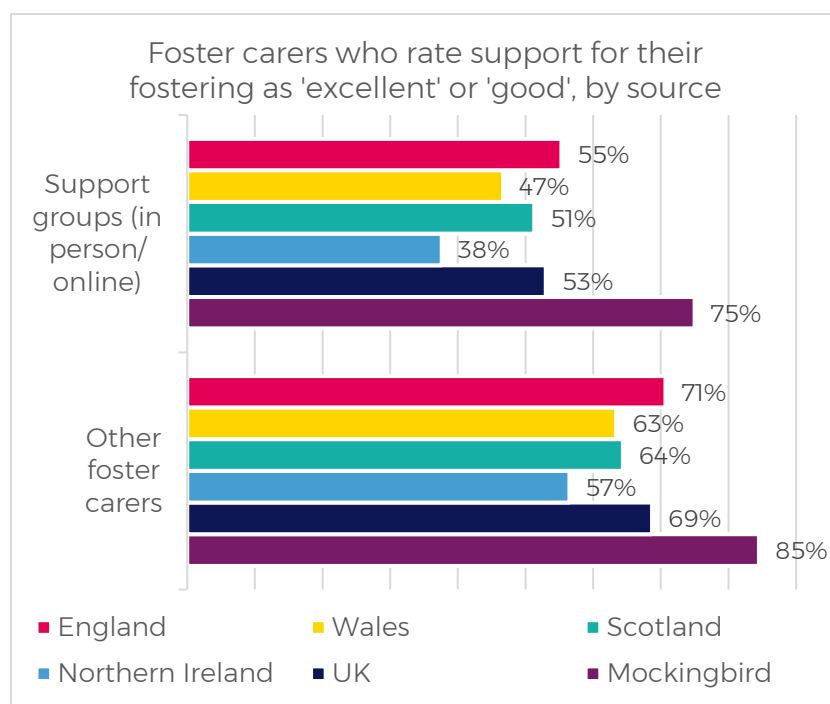
Less than half of foster carers (48%) said they have access to an approved support network or person who can provide overnight care for the children they foster. This ranged from 43% in Northern Ireland, to 46% in Scotland, 47% in Wales and 49% in England.

Importantly, **foster carers with access to an approved support network or person who can provide overnight care were over three times more likely to recommend fostering** than those without it.

Foster carers' wellbeing

Like any caring role, fostering can lead to burnout and compassion fatigue. Caring for people who have experienced trauma, as many children in foster care have, can also create a risk of secondary trauma for foster carers, at further detriment to their wellbeing. As the following section shows, the needs of children in care have also become more complex, with less support available for them, so the role of a foster carer has become more demanding.

58% of foster carers said they have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing because of their fostering role. This was significantly lower in Scotland (49%); similar in England (59%) and Wales (56%); and higher in Northern Ireland (63%).



Mockingbird foster carers were significantly more likely to have access to an approved support network or person (85%) than other foster carers (45%).

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

Concerningly, **less than half of foster carers (48%) said they feel able to ask for support for their wellbeing when they need it**, without fear of negative consequences for them or the children they foster. In keeping with the previous question, this was higher in Scotland (54%), lower in Northern Ireland (41%), and similar in England (49%) and Wales (45%).

Mockingbird foster carers were less likely to have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing (54%) than other foster carers (58%), and significantly more likely to feel able to ask for support (64%) than other foster carers (47%).

There was a two-way statistically significant relationship between the two factors. This means that those who have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing because of their fostering role were significantly less likely to feel able to ask for support when they need it (36%), and those who said they feel able to ask for support were significantly less likely to have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing because of their fostering role (43%).

Foster carers who have experienced burnout were also significantly less likely to recommend fostering, while those who said they feel able to ask for support were significantly more likely to recommend it.

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Invest in the social work workforce to increase retention and reduce turnover, creating opportunities for more meaningful, long-term working relationships between foster carers and social workers.
- Review working patterns for social care workers to ensure foster carers can access their SSWs out of hours and to aid efforts to improve retention.
- Fund innovative fostering programmes that focus on retention and support, including peer support.

Fostering services should:

- Increase out of hours support for foster carers. Explore providing out of hours support through a fostering specific support line operated by foster carers, expanding on the benefits of peer support.
- Ensure all foster carers have an approved support network or person who is well known to the children they foster and can provide overnight care for them. Organise days out and sleepovers for children as a routine part of fostering.
- Provide all foster carers with a comprehensive package of emotional and mental health support including counselling.
- Create a culture of talking openly about wellbeing without judgement, with provision to provide additional support to foster carers as soon as it is needed.

Support for children in foster care

Children and young people in care have often experienced trauma and adversity which can affect their development, educational attainment, mental health and wellbeing. Every child in care has the potential to thrive with the right support, but too often this support isn't available when they need it, or isn't adequate.

Support for learning

Half (53%) of foster carers said at least one of the children they foster receives additional support with their learning, ranging from 42% in Wales, to 53% in Scotland, 54% in England and 56% in Northern Ireland. On average in the UK, this proportion has decreased from 64% in 2021, despite national data showing that the proportion of children in care who have special educational needs has increased in this time.²

Our data suggests that fewer children in foster care are receiving additional support that they need for their learning than in 2021, and the support they are receiving may be less sufficient.

Of those who foster a child who receives additional support with their learning, **53% said they think this additional support is sufficient**, ranging from only 40% in Wales, to 52% in Northern Ireland and 54% in both England and Scotland. This has decreased from four fifths (59%) in 2021.

The most common forms of additional support for learning reported in comments were tutoring; one-to-one support in school; and support from teaching/ pupil support assistants. 11% of foster carers specified that a child they foster attends a special school.

In England, an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is a legal document that describes a child or young person's educational, health and social care needs, and explains the extra support they are entitled to, to meet those needs. The threshold for securing these is high. Of foster carers we surveyed in England, 44% said at least one of the children they foster has an EHCP.

In Scotland, all children and young people who are looked after are entitled to a Coordinated Support Plan (CSP). A CSP is an action plan used for some pupils who need support with their education, which sets broad and long-term goals for them. Of foster carers we surveyed in Scotland, 30% said at least one of the children they foster has a CSP.

Mental health support

45% of foster carers said at least one child they foster is either receiving mental health or wellbeing support or is on a waiting list for support. The proportion fostering a child who is receiving support fell very slightly from 29% in 2021, to 28% in 2024. This ranged from 22% in Northern Ireland, to 25% in Wales, 27% in Scotland and 29% in England. **The proportion fostering a child who is being referred or waiting for support increased from 12% to 18% in the same time**

"The waiting list can be 2/3 years, it's essential the process should be fast-tracked."

Increasing numbers of children in foster care are waiting for mental health support.

² For example, in England, 55.5% of children looked after at 31 March 2022/23 had special educational needs, up from 53.3% in 2020/21. See Department for Education (2024) [Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England](#)

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

period. This was similar in England (17%), Wales (15%) and Scotland (18%) but significantly higher in Northern Ireland (26%).

The most common type of mental health support received by children was therapy or counselling, and the most common sources of support were child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and school. For children who were being referred or on a waiting list, this was most frequently for CAMHS, often to be assessed, and often in relation to autism, ADHD or other neurodiversity.

Two in five foster carers are fostering a child who needs mental health support but isn't getting it, up from a third in 2021.

Two in five foster carers (39%) said they are fostering a child who is not receiving mental health or wellbeing support but should have access to it. This was similar in England (39%), Wales (37%) and Scotland (40%) but higher in Northern Ireland (49%). This has increased from a third (33%) in 2021.

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Provide adequate funding to meet demand for additional support for learning and for counselling services within and outside of term-time, in all schools and colleges.
- Invest urgently in children's mental health services to reduce waiting times and ensure all children get the help they need.
- Urgently review the barriers to children accessing additional support for learning in each nation.

Placing authorities should:

- Increase access to Education, Health and Care Plans in England and Coordinated Support Plans in Scotland.
- Ensure all children coming into care receive a mental health assessment as soon as possible.

Fostering services should:

- Employ dedicated mental health professionals to provide assessments and ongoing support for children and young people, and to support their foster carers to provide them with therapeutic, trauma-informed care.

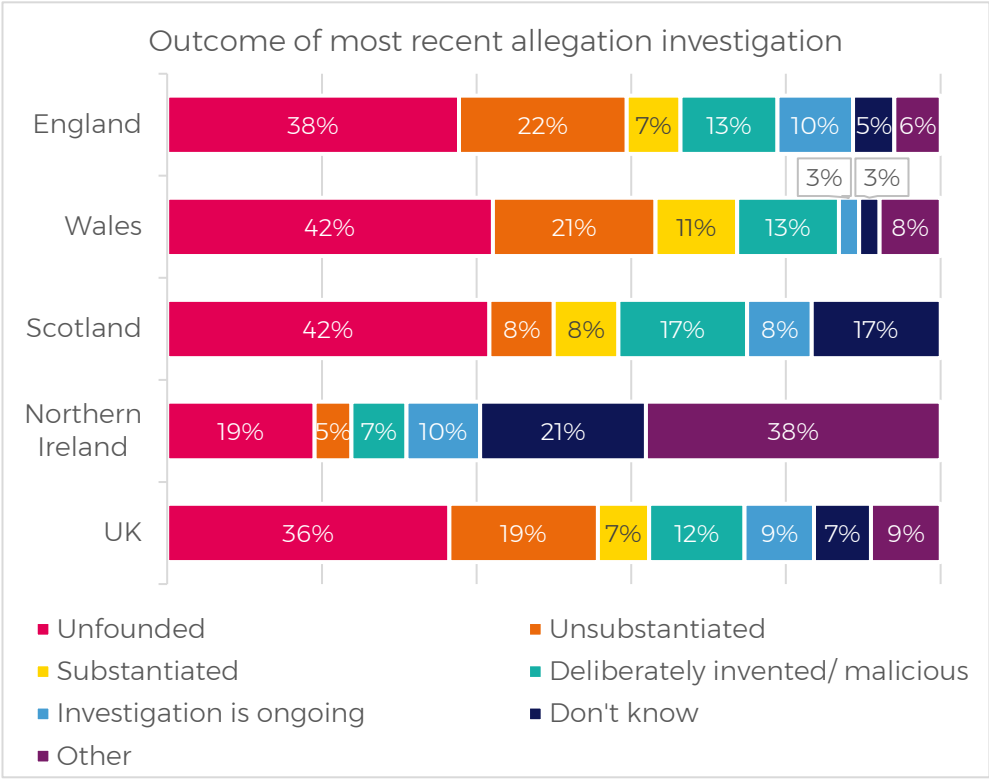
Universal services should:

- Provide regular training for all staff on care experience, trauma and trauma-informed practice.

Allegations

An allegation is a claim from any person that a foster carer or another member of the fostering household has or may have: behaved in a way that has harmed a child; committed a criminal offence against a child; or behaved in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with children.

14% of foster carers said they have experienced one or more allegations in the past 24 months, down from 17% in 2021.³ This proportion (in 2024) ranged from 7% in Scotland, to 14% in England, 15% in Wales and 26% in Northern Ireland. The figure in Northern Ireland likely isn't comparable with the rest of the UK as many of these respondents commented, under the 'other' option in the following question, that their service doesn't distinguish between allegations, complaints and concerns.



On average, of those with experience of allegations in the past 24 months, **over a third** said the outcome of their most recent investigation was 'unfounded', meaning the allegation was disproven or there was no evidence to support that it happened. **A fifth** said it was 'unsubstantiated', meaning there was some evidence but not enough to determine whether it happened. Over one in ten said the outcome was 'deliberately invented or malicious'.

The least common outcome (7%) was 'substantiated', meaning there was evidence to determine that the alleged event happened. Foster carers in Scotland and Northern Ireland were more likely to say they don't know what the outcome was.

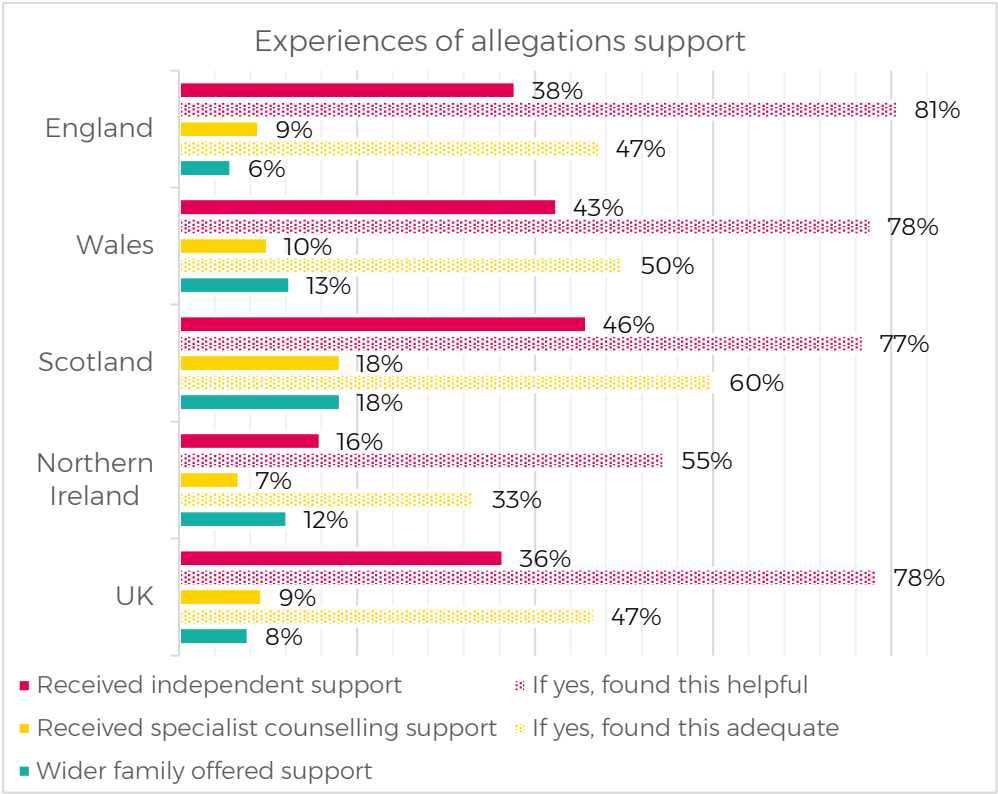
Allegations support

It is recognised as best practice for foster carers to receive independent support through the allegations process and in England this is a regulatory requirement. However, we found that **just over a third of foster carers surveyed received independent support** in relation to their most recent allegation, the same as in 2021. Three quarters found this helpful, up from 59% in 2021.

³ This decrease may be because we provided more detail about what an allegation is in the 2024 survey so respondents were able to answer the question more accurately.

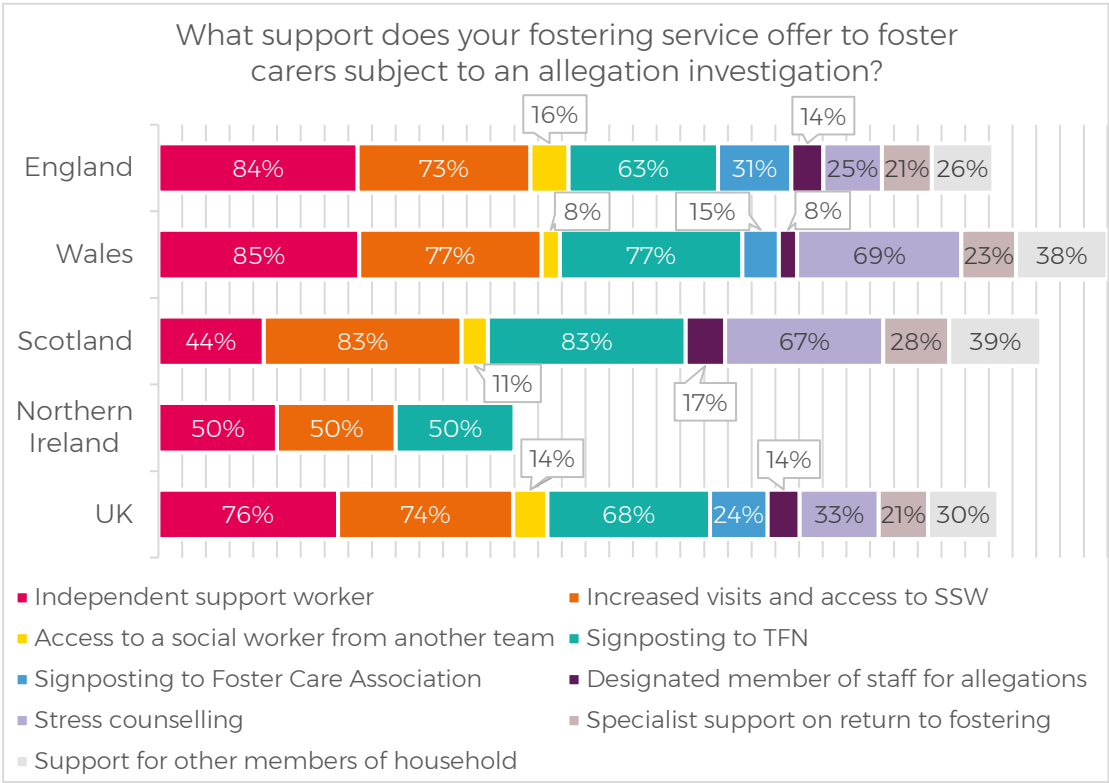
State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

Less than one in ten received specialist counselling support and around half of these found the support adequate. Similarly, less than one in ten said their wider family was offered support by their fostering service. Allegations against foster carers can be extremely distressing for them and affect their whole family, so this support is vital for their wellbeing and to enable them to continue fostering when it is right to do so.



We also asked fostering services what support they offer foster carers subject to allegations. Three quarters said they provide an independent support worker, or increased visits and access to supervising social workers, while two thirds said they signpost foster carers to The Fostering Network’s advice line and legal insurance scheme.

A third said they provide stress counselling or support for other members of the fostering household. A quarter said they signpost foster carers to their service’s Foster Care Association – attributable solely to England and Wales – while one in five said they provide specialist support when a foster carer is returning to fostering. 14% said they provide access to a social worker from another team, or has a named, designated member of staff for allegations.



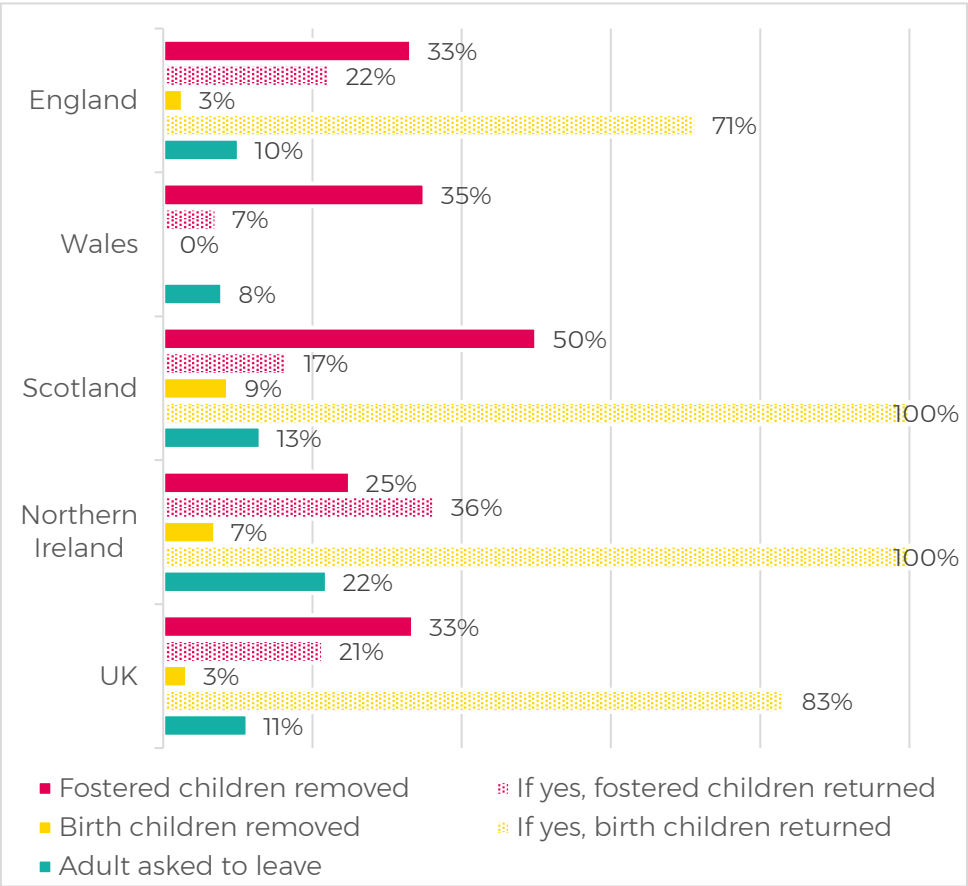
Timescales of investigations

The most common duration of allegations investigations was up to one month (33%). Concerningly, one in six respondents (17%) said their latest investigation took six months to one year, and one in ten said the investigation took over a year. Investigations were typically the shortest in Scotland, where 48% took up to one month, and longest in Northern Ireland, where 42% took six months to a year.

Removal of children

A third of foster carers said a child they fostered was removed from their home during their most recent allegation investigation, up from a quarter (25%) in 2021. This time we also asked if the child was returned; around a fifth of foster carers said yes.

3% of foster carers said a birth child was removed, up from 1% in 2021. Over four fifths of these said the child was returned. One in ten said they or another adult in the home were asked to leave.



Finances during allegations investigations

We asked foster carers who had children they foster removed about their experiences with finances. 42% said they received their usual level of foster carer fees during the allegation investigation, ranging from 36% in Wales, to 39% in England, 55% in Northern Ireland and 73% in Scotland. 46% said payment of fees (whether full or partial) continued throughout the entire investigation, ranging from 39% in Wales, to 43% in England, 64% in Northern Ireland and 67% in Scotland. In comparison, two thirds (67%) of fostering services said they continue to pay foster carers fees for the full duration of the investigation (35%) or part of the investigation (32%).

Impact of allegations on foster carers

We asked foster carers to share how experiences of allegations have impacted them. They discussed being affected in profound and multiple ways:

State of the Nations’ Foster Care 2024

- **Experiences of fostering (35%)**, including feelings about fostering, fear of allegations, relationships with services, and confidence as a foster carer.
- **Health (25%)**, primarily mental health.
- Their wider **family (7%)**.
- **Personal relationships (5%)**, including with partners.
- **Other aspects of foster carers’ lives (5%)**, including reputation, work and volunteering.
- **Finances (5%)**, largely from losing their fostering fees.

“It has ruined me, my mental health, my trust in social services and left me doubting continuing in this profession as I’m terrified I could experience this again.”

Management of allegations

In addition, we asked fostering services how well they think the allegations process is managed. Respondents generally felt that their own service manages ok or well but that others – usually local authority children’s services and the police – let them down. The key themes raised were:

- **Policies and processes (59%)** – issues with timeframes and understanding of processes.
- **Support for foster carers (13%)** – perceptions varied but were more positive than negative.
- **Inconsistency** in how allegations are managed (11%) – mostly attributed to local authorities.
- Issues with **joint working (8%)** – particularly information-sharing with police and others.

“The length of time between allegation and police investigation is outwith the control of services and means that carers can sit for many months in limbo.”

Foster carers’ perceptions of the way the process is managed, gathered from their other comments in this section, were generally poorer than those of services.

Improving the allegations process

Finally, we asked foster carers what would improve the allegations experience for them, and fostering services what more could be done to improve practice in relation to allegations in fostering families. The most common themes mentioned by each group were as follows.

Foster carers: What would improve the allegations experience for you?	Fostering services: What more could be done to improve practice in relation to allegations in fostering families?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fairness (39%), including full consideration of evidence, better treatment of foster carers, accountability for services, independent investigation and decision-making, and rights for foster carers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better processes and policies (50%), including quicker and clearer timescales, and clearer policies which are followed better.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better communication and information-sharing (35%), including more information on the specific allegation and the allegations process, and better communication from fostering services in general.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better support for foster carers (17%).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better support for foster carers (30%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More and/or better training for foster carers and staff in services (12%).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better processes and policies (25%), including quicker and clearer timeframes, and clearer policies which are followed better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better joint working between services (9%).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More and/or better training for foster carers and social workers (3%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better communication with foster carers (7%).

These findings suggest a potential disconnect between foster carers' and fostering services' priorities around allegations, particularly regarding fairness and communication.

Recommendations

Governments should:

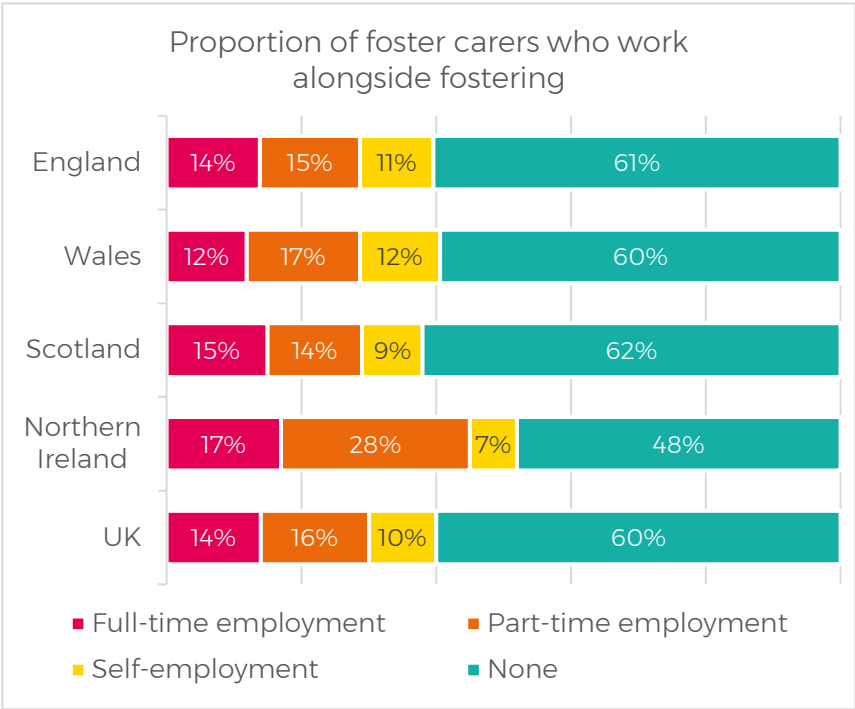
- Increase awareness and understanding of the impact of allegations in foster families among partners in justice, health, education and children's services, to reduce avoidable delay and improve outcomes for children.
- Fund services to continue paying foster carer fees during vacancies, including when these are due to allegation investigations.
- Fund independent support services and legal protection for foster carers experiencing an allegation.
- Separate the process of continued approval from the allegation investigation process so continued approval is managed by an independent body, such as a national register of foster carers.

Fostering services should:

- Distinguish between allegations, complaints and standard of care concerns.
- Provide all foster carers subject to an allegation with access to independent support, specialist counselling support, and support for their wider families. Ensure foster carers are aware of the support available to them, including from external sources.
- Improve communication around allegations in line with safeguarding legislation so foster carers are informed verbally and in writing, every step of the way.
- Increase efforts to keep children in the home when an allegation has been made, where it is safe to do so.
- Ensure children and young people have access to advocacy.

Finances

All foster carers receive an allowance which should cover the costs of looking after the children they foster. Most foster carers also receive a fee in recognition of their role. However, our research continues to show that allowances and fees are often inadequate and many foster carers have to top up their income in other ways to be able to afford to foster.



Work and benefits

Across the UK, **40% of foster carers said they work alongside their fostering**, a slight increase from 39% in 2021. Respondents in Northern Ireland were significantly more likely to work alongside their fostering (52%) than those in England (40%), Wales (40%) and Scotland (39%).

For the first time this year, we asked foster carers if they are receiving any state benefits (excluding benefits for children in their care). **A quarter (23%) said they receive benefits**, ranging from 18% in Northern Ireland, to 23% in England, 24% in

Scotland, and 28% in Wales. Of these, the majority reported receiving Universal Credit (61%); the next most common benefit received was some form of disability benefit (17%).

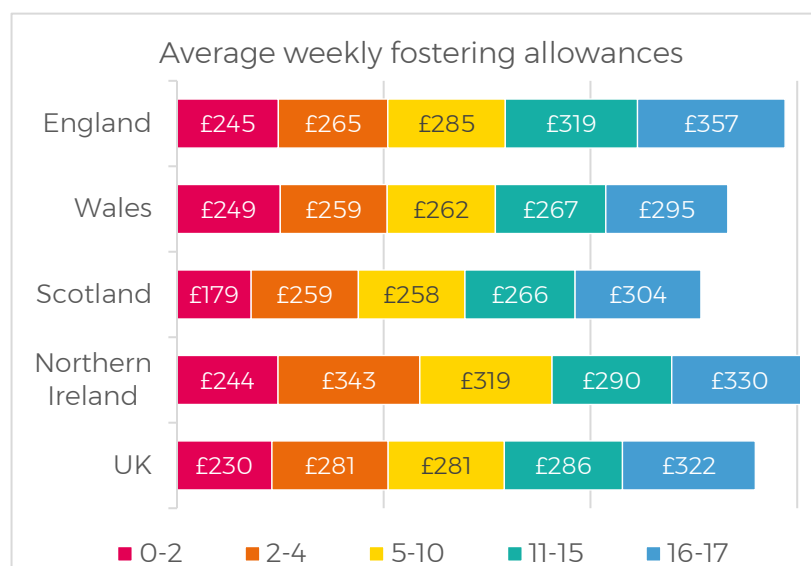
Of all respondents, **15% have experienced difficulties with claiming benefits** due to their position as a foster carer, ranging from 11% in Northern Ireland, to 14% in Scotland, 15% in England, and 16% in Wales. The key difficulties mentioned in comments were:

- **A lack of understanding** of foster care and entitlements to benefits among benefits agency staff, contributing to a lack of understanding of entitlements among foster carers themselves.
- **Not being eligible** for benefits, or thinking they aren't.
- **Requirements around work** and looking for work, such as having to work a minimum number of hours per week, or to attend 'back to work' meetings even though it would be impossible for them to work alongside the demands of their fostering role.

"Staff at the Job Centre not knowing much about fostering, the role, what it entails and what you're signed up to. Still insisting I look for work but know it's not possible with meetings and courses to attend."

Fostering allowances

The average weekly fostering allowances foster carers said they receive are shown in the table to the right. Apart from the 2-4 age group, these are all **lower than our recommended allowance rates**, calculated based on Loughborough University's Minimum Income Standard research and our work with Pro Bono Economics on the costs of raising a child in foster care.



Over half (57%) of foster carers said

they are able to claim expenses in addition to their allowance. The top five things they said they can claim for were: travel related expenses; furniture and equipment; clothing; holidays and celebrations; and activities. Some reported that while they are aware they can claim expenses, they don't as they find it too time consuming or complicated.

Only a third (34%) of foster carers said their fostering allowance and any expenses they can claim meet the full costs of looking after the children they foster. This has fallen considerably from 56% in 2021, and ranges from as low as a quarter in Northern Ireland (24%) and Wales (25%) to 31% in Scotland and 36% in England.

Only 1 in 3 foster carers said the allowance and any expenses they can claim meet the full costs of looking after the children they foster, down from over half in 2021.

The most commonly mentioned outstanding costs were: activities (including day trips, clubs, hobbies, meals out, and socialising with friends); holidays; clothing; birthdays and Christmases; school or educational costs; and equipment (ranging from baby equipment such as prams and car seats, to tech equipment like phones and computers).

"Inflation has gone up dramatically in comparison to the rise in the allowance... most of the extra things, like after school clubs, swimming, playgroups, football clubs, etc are no longer possible."

A third of foster carers (30%) said they cover this extra cost by working, one in ten (12%) said they claim benefits, and **almost three quarters (72%) said they use other personal income** such as their foster carer fees, savings, or partner's income.

Foster carer fees

Across the UK, **over half (56%) of foster carers said they receive a fee**, ranging from 41% in Northern Ireland, to 47% in Wales, and 58% in both England and Scotland. This has decreased from 63% in 2021. **One in ten foster carers don't know if they receive a fee**, down from 12% in 2021. In comparison, **90% of services said they pay a fee**, ranging from 50% in Northern Ireland, to 89% in Scotland, 92% in Wales and 93% in England. FOIs we conducted on fees with local authorities found that services do not always distinguish clearly between foster carers' fees and allowances.⁴

⁴ The Fostering Network (2024) [Out of Pocket: Fairer Fees for Foster Carers](#)

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

Of foster carers who receive a fee:

- Almost half said it is calculated **per child**, down to a quarter in Northern Ireland.
- Just over half of foster carers in England said their fee is calculated according to their **skill/approval level**, compared to just over a third in Wales and Scotland, and 7% in Northern Ireland.
- Payment according to **children's needs** is more common in Northern Ireland (19%) and less common in Wales and Scotland (both 5%) than in England (12%).
- Payment according to **children's age** is more common in England (23%) and Scotland (20%) than in Wales (14%) or Northern Ireland (7%).
- Foster carers in Northern Ireland are the most likely to receive a **flat rate** (39%), followed by those in Scotland (30%), Wales (24%) and England (20%).

As for the sufficiency of fees, only a quarter of foster carers said they feel their fee is sufficient to cover their essential living costs, for example bills, rent or mortgage, and food (not for the children they foster).

Only a quarter of foster carers said their fee is sufficient to cover their essential living costs.

Retainer fees

Two thirds (66%) of foster carers said they don't receive a retainer fee if they don't have a foster child living with them, a slight decrease from 70% in 2021. 18% said they don't know if they receive a retainer, up from 15% in 2021. Foster carers in Scotland were more likely to receive a retainer while those in Northern Ireland were more likely to say they don't know if they do.

Of those who receive a retainer and know how long for, the most common duration of payment was 2-4 weeks in England and Northern Ireland, 5-8 weeks in Scotland, and 9-12 weeks in Wales. However, fostering services that pay a retainer most commonly said that the duration of payment is decided on a case by case basis.

Support for a national fee framework

While allowances are set nationally by each of the four governments of the UK, there is no central legislation or guidance about fees for foster carers. Fees are decided individually by each fostering service provider. We asked all survey respondents for their views on this; **two thirds of foster carers (65%) and fostering services (64%) said governments should each set a national fee framework to apply across all fostering services.**

Managing finances

On average across the UK, just under three quarters (73%) of foster carers said the cost of living has had an impact on their fostering. Foster carers in Scotland were significantly less likely to say this (67%) than those in England (73%), Wales and Northern Ireland (both 77%).

"[the cost of living] has taken the joy out of fostering and life. Everything is a struggle and I feel trapped."

Three quarters of foster carers said the cost of living has had an impact on their fostering.

When we asked foster carers **how** the cost of living has affected their fostering, they frequently mentioned facing higher household costs and having to

"The overall cost of living has increased but allowances have remained low. Without benefits I would have to stop fostering."

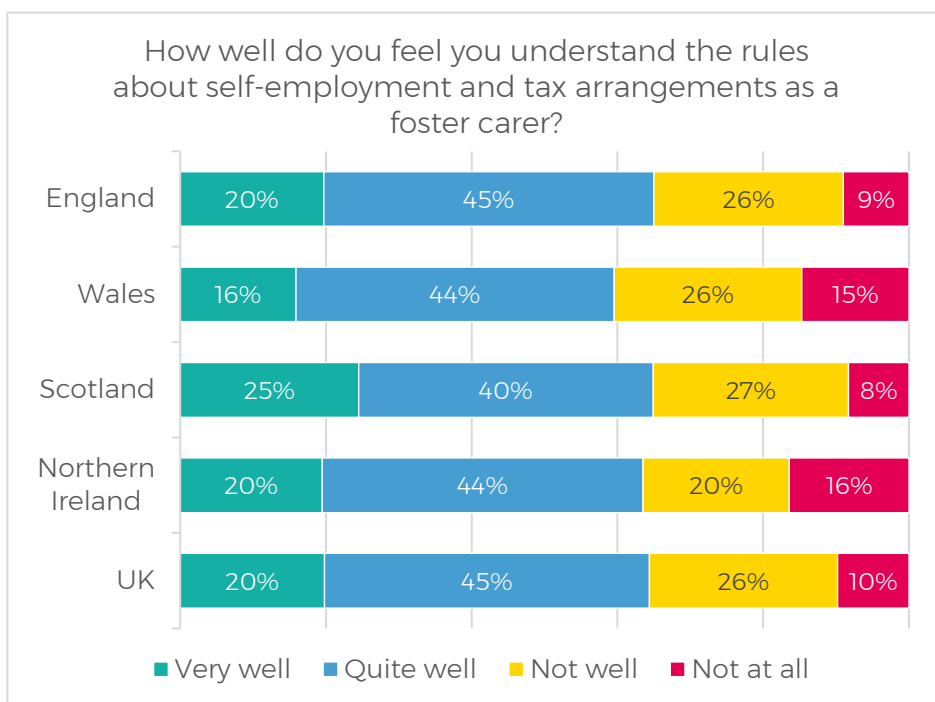
State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

cut back on spending, affecting the opportunities they can give to the children they foster. They also often discussed making ends meet by taking on (additional) employment, relying on a partner's income, or using personal savings. Some shared that they are considering resigning from fostering as they can't afford to continue, and many said payments haven't kept up with the cost of living.

Tax arrangements

Foster carers are self-employed for tax purposes and have to submit an annual tax return. Most foster carers (65%) said they feel they understand the rules about self-employment and tax arrangements as a foster carer

very (20%) or quite well (45%), although those in Wales and Northern Ireland were more likely than those in England and Scotland to say they don't understand them at all.



Recommendations

Governments should:

- Increase national minimum allowances for foster carers to match The Fostering Network's [recommended rates](#), and commit to an inflationary uplift each year.
- Carry out a comprehensive review of foster carer fees. Introduce, invest in, and monitor the delivery of a national recommended fee framework for foster carers, with fees to be paid for 52 weeks a year, including between placements and during allegation investigations. Commit to an inflationary uplift each year.
- Work with benefits agencies to improve staff members' understanding of foster carers' entitlements.
- Introduce a statutory minimum entitlement to five days' paid leave for foster carers who work alongside their fostering, in line with our [Fostering Friendly employers](#) scheme.

Fostering services should:

- Provide all foster carers with transparent information about their fostering payments to distinguish between their fees and allowances, and publish this information.
- Remove the bureaucracy of expense claims by implementing systems that reflect trust in foster carers to make the best use of funds provided on a day-to-day basis.

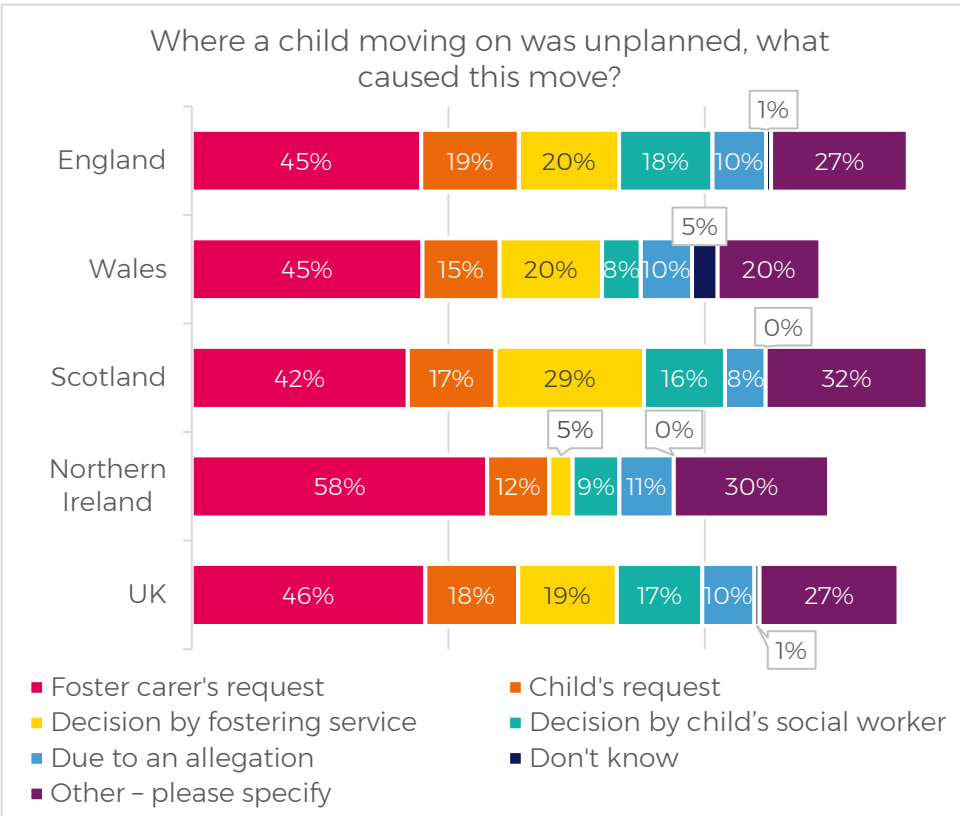
Part Three: Endings and Post-Foster Care

Children moving on in foster care

46% of foster carers said they have experienced a child move to another foster family, or to another care arrangement, in the past 24 months, down from 50% in 2021. This was higher in England (47%) and Wales (44%) than Scotland and Northern Ireland (both 39%).

Unplanned endings

Of foster carers who experienced a move in the past 24 months, two thirds (64%) said this included an unplanned ending – a concerning increase from 45% in 2021. This ranged from 63% in both England and Wales, to 65% in Scotland and 66% in Northern Ireland.



The most common cause of unplanned endings was the foster carer's own request (46%, up from 42% in 2021). Around a fifth of unplanned endings were attributed to the child's request (18%, down from 20% in 2021) or to a decision by the fostering service (19%, the same as in 2021). We changed the option of 'the child's placing authority' to 'the child's social worker' this time but the proportion remained the same at 17%. Allegations accounted for a smaller proportion of reasons for unplanned endings this time (10%) than in 2021 (15%).

"The plan was that we would adopt but local authority was too slow to provide an adequate level of support and short breaks which led to the sad decision to move the child to residential care."

Additionally, in 2024, over a quarter of respondents (27%) said their latest unplanned ending was caused by a factor(s) not listed in the survey question. In their comments, the most frequently mentioned reasons for unplanned endings related to:

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

- **Safeguarding** – with respect to the children moving on, other children in the household, or foster carers.
- General references to '**placement breakdown**', including accounts of foster carers being unable to manage (not necessarily requesting a move).
- The **foster carer's own situation**, for instance their health.

Respondents also clarified in some cases that the move was instigated by a child running away rather than explicitly requesting to move. Some shared their feelings about moves, for example, indicating that they could have been prevented with better support.

We asked fostering services to identify the single most common cause of unplanned endings in their service. Like foster carers, they most frequently said unplanned endings were caused by the foster carer's own request (71%), and those in Scotland were more likely to say unplanned endings were a decision by the fostering service (14%) than those in England (5%), Wales (6%) or Northern Ireland (neither service).

Reducing unplanned endings

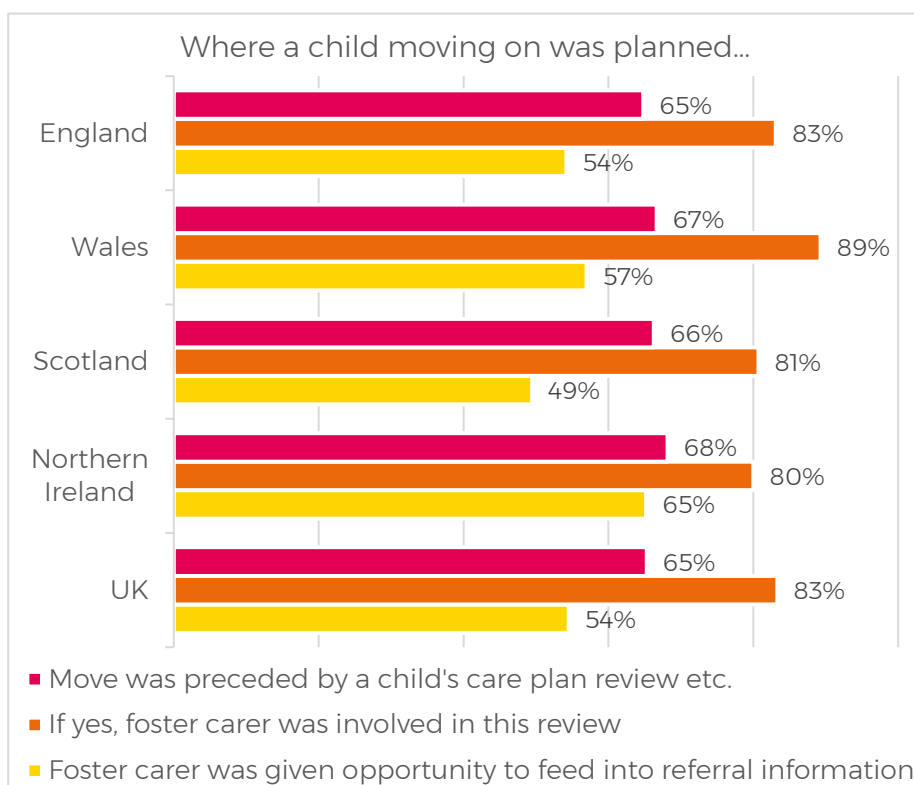
In 2024, we asked fostering services a new question on what they consider to be the main changes required to reduce unplanned endings for children in foster care. Of 114 written comments, the top themes were as follows:

- **Support (56%)** – including specialist and/or therapeutic support for children and foster carers, quicker access to support, and more preventative help.
- **Information and communication (29%)** – including local authorities sharing all the relevant information about children with foster carers and fostering services.
- **Better matching (16%)** of children and foster carers.
- **Sufficiency (13%)** – a wider range of foster carers equipped to meet children's needs (this would also enable better matching).

Planned endings

78% of foster carers who have experienced a child move on in the past 24 months said this included a planned ending, ranging from 75% in Northern Ireland, to 77% in Scotland, 78% in England and 81% in Wales. This has decreased slightly from 81% in 2021.

Of those who have experienced a planned ending, on average across the UK, **65% said their latest planned ending was preceded by a child's care plan review, a looked after child review or children's hearing.**



State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

This is almost unchanged from 66% in 2021. 83% said they were involved in this review, compared to 80% in 2021.

Just over half (54%) of foster carers surveyed said they were given the opportunity to feed into the referral information for the child's next care arrangement in relation to their latest planned ending, compared to 57% in 2021. This figure (in 2024) was higher in Northern Ireland (65%) and lower in Scotland (49%).

Views on decisions to move children

Of foster carers who have experienced a child moving on in the past 24 months, **50% said decisions to move children have**

Only half of foster carers feel decisions to move children are always or usually in the best interests of the child.

always or usually been in the best interest of the child, ranging from 48% in Northern Ireland, to 50% in England and Scotland, and 52% in Wales. Although still far lower than it should be, this has increased considerably from just under a third (32%) in 2021.

"I did not agree with the decision, my child only had 18 hours notice then the social workers came to take them to a children's home. I am utterly devastated and appalled I was not included in this decision."

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Improve data and analysis and commission research on reasons for unplanned endings to improve stability for children.

Placing authorities should:

- Ensure all planned moves for children are preceded by a child's care plan review, looked after child review or children's hearing, and that foster carers can participate in these.
- Ensure foster carers have the opportunity to contribute to referral information for a child or young person's next care arrangement.

Fostering services should:

- Review the reasons for unplanned endings for children to inform learning and service improvement.
- Develop the offer of specialist and/or therapeutic support for children and foster carers and ensure this is available early to prevent avoidable moves for children.

Placing authorities and fostering services should:

- Take action to improve matching of children and foster carers, including by developing joint training for staff, ensuring children's profile information is of high quality and is shared with fostering services and potential carers well ahead of any move, and enabling new carers to meet children before they move in (see Matching).

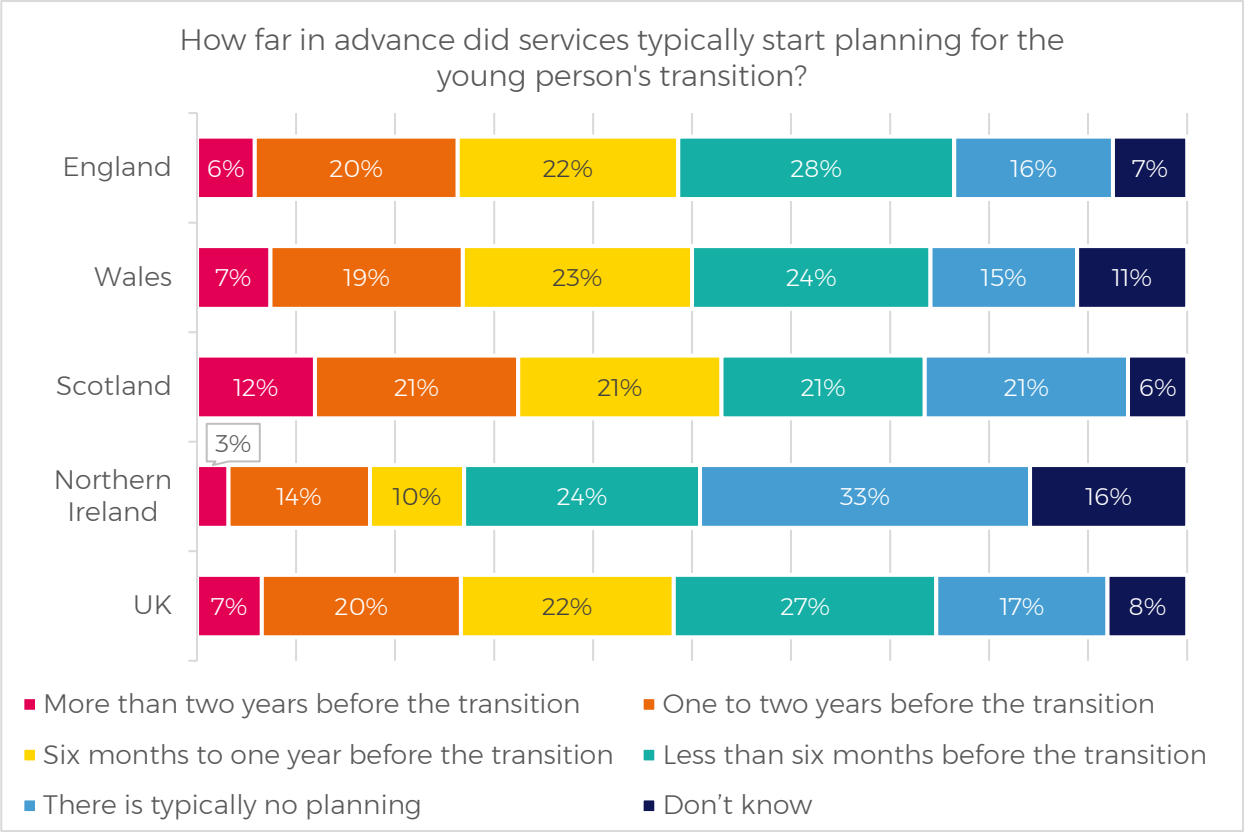
Post-foster care

Until recently, most young people in foster care were required to leave their foster home as soon as they turned 18, far earlier than their peers not in care – who leave home aged 24 on average⁵ – and often before they are ready. Following our ‘Don’t Move Me’ campaign, young people in England can now stay with their foster family until the age of 21 through the **Staying Put** programme. Elsewhere in the UK, young people can stay with their foster families up to age 21 through **When I am Ready** in Wales, **Continuing Care** in Scotland (also available to those in kinship and residential care), and **Going the Extra Mile** in Northern Ireland (only for those in education, employment or training). These programmes are known as post-foster care.

Most foster carers (53%) said they have never fostered a young person up to ‘leaving care age’ (usually age 18 but sometimes 16 in Scotland). This ranged from 50% in Scotland, to 53% in England, 56% in Wales and 60% in Northern Ireland. The following questions were asked only of those who have fostered a young person up to the appropriate age.

Transition planning

Early planning is important to ensure smooth transitions between, and out of, care arrangements. However, **over a quarter (27%) of foster carers said services typically start planning less than six months before a young person’s transition out of care or into a post-foster care arrangement.** A further **17% said there is typically no planning;** this was higher in Scotland (21%) and significantly higher in Northern Ireland (33%).



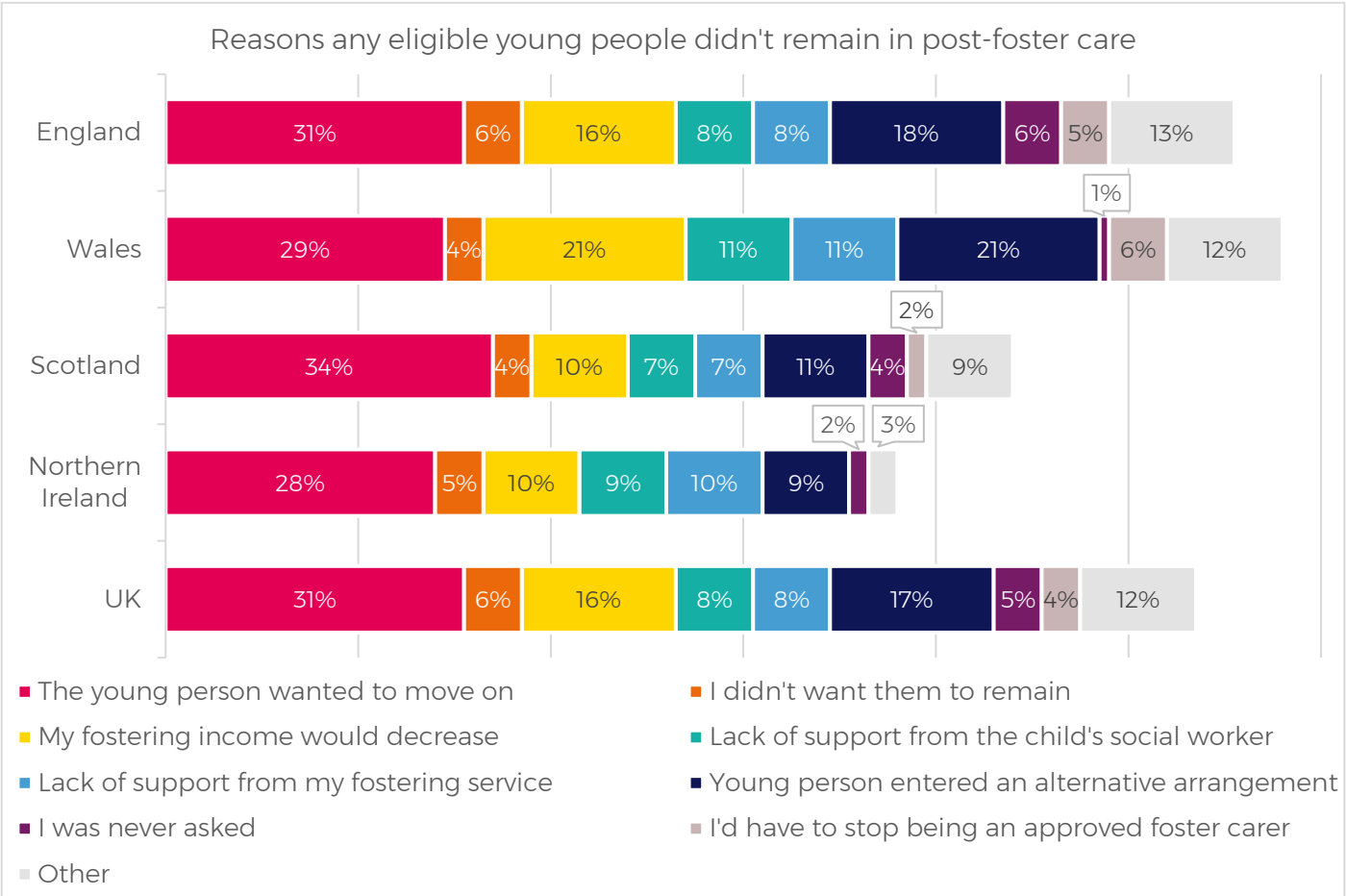
⁵ ONS (2024) [Milestones: Journeying through modern life](#)

Barriers to post-foster care arrangements

We asked foster carers to share the reasons any eligible young people didn't remain with them in a post-foster care arrangement when they reached the appropriate age. The top three reasons were the same as in 2021, but the percentages differed:

- The **young person didn't want to stay** (31%, down from 42%).
- The **young person entered an alternative arrangement** such as Shared Lives or supported lodgings (17%, down from 30%).
- The foster carer's **fostering income would decrease** (16%, up from 13%).

Encouragingly, less than one in ten foster carers cited a lack of support from their fostering service (8%) or from the child's social worker (8%) as reasons young people didn't remain with them – down from 10% and 13%, respectively, in 2021. Fewer foster carers said they didn't want the young person to stay (6%, down from 9%), were never asked (5%, down from 11%), or would lose their approval as a foster carer (4%, down from 6%), than in 2021.



As shown, in 2024, foster carers in England and particularly those in Wales were more likely than those in Scotland and Northern Ireland to say an eligible young person didn't stay in a post-foster care arrangement because their fostering income would decrease, or because the young person entered an alternative arrangement. Figures for the other reasons were broadly similar across the four nations.

Finances in post-foster care arrangements

Three quarters of foster carers said they are worse off financially as a result of offering a post-foster care arrangement. While this is the same proportion as in 2021, respondents in 2024 were more likely to be **significantly worse off (52%)** than in 2021 (44%). Foster carers in Scotland were the least likely to report being worse off (57%), followed by those in Northern Ireland (64%), England (78%) and Wales (85%). This is consistent with trends across the four nations in 2021.

Three quarters of foster carers said they are worse off financially as a result of offering a post-foster care arrangement.

The average allowance received by foster carers supporting young people in post-foster care arrangements was £256.74, and the average fee was £222.65. This is considerably lower than the average allowance of £346.58 for foster carers looking after young people aged 16-17, and average foster carer fee of £333.05, among our survey respondents.

Just over half (54%) of foster carers said the young person is expected to contribute towards their allowance, ranging from 22% in Scotland, to 44% in Northern Ireland, 60% in England and 64% in Wales. 141 foster carers specified the amount young people are expected to contribute. The most frequent amounts specified, in order of value, were:

- between £10 and £20 per week (11%)
- between £20 and £50 per week (50%)
- between £50 and £100 per week (21%)
- over £100 per week (12%).

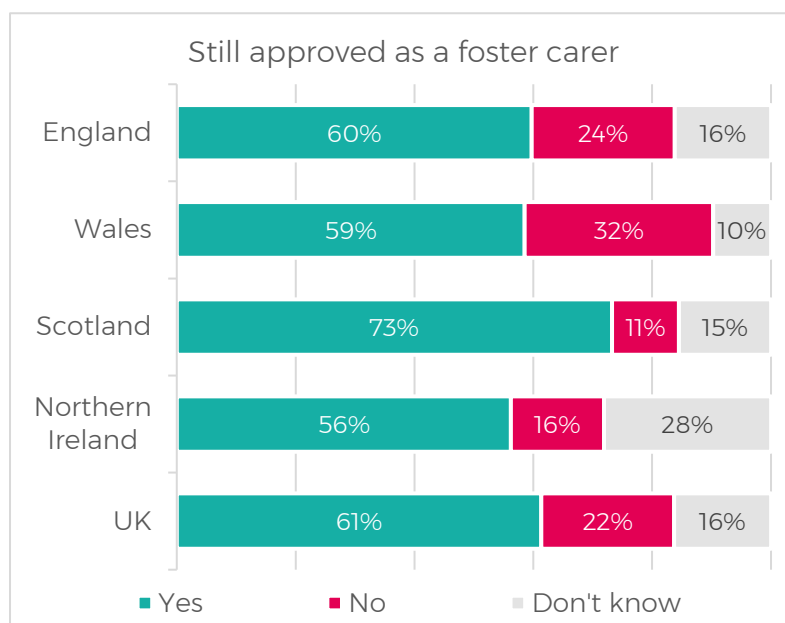
52 foster carers also specified the purpose of the young person's contribution. In most cases (67%) they said 'rent' or accommodation costs. Additionally, 35 foster carers named the source of the young person's contribution. 69% said the funds are taken from young people's benefits, 34% from their work.

13% of comments mentioned young people not paying the contribution, either because they are unwilling to, can't afford to, or the foster carer refuses to take money from them.

Approval status

Most foster carers (61%) in a post-foster care arrangement and with no other children in foster care living with them said they are still an approved foster carer. Foster carers in Scotland were most likely to report still being approved, while those in Northern Ireland were most likely to say they don't know.

86% of fostering services said they enable foster carers to maintain their approval either in all circumstances (39%) or if they intend to return to fostering (47%). Services in Scotland were more likely to



say they enable foster carers to maintain their approval in all circumstances (67%) than those in England (36%), Wales (33%) or Northern Ireland (one of two services).

Improving post-foster care arrangements

Foster carers had the opportunity to share anything else they would like to say about how well post-foster care arrangements are working for the young people they foster. The most common themes were as follows:

- **Finances (34%)** – including issues with accessing financial support; the effect of finances on decisions about post-foster care; and the financial impact of entering a post-foster care arrangement.
- **Timings (21%)** – covering young people's readiness to move into independence, issues around planning, feeling pressured or rushed, and delays.
- **Benefits of post-foster care (12%)** – including the continuity and stability it gives young people.
- **General dissatisfaction (10%)** – that post-foster care arrangements aren't working well.
- **Issues around processes (7%)** – including a lack of clarity, information, and consistency.
- **Motivations to support young people (7%)** – including that they are family.

"This transition has been traumatic and felt like we were being abandoned and also the continuing work we will do with the child unrecognised purely because they have reached a chronological milestone rather than adapting to the child's needs."

"It does not last long enough. Social services usually want the young person to move on to independent/ supported living because they don't have the money or staff to allow them to stay with us for longer. This is always against our wishes because we know that the young person is not ready to move from the family environment."

We asked fostering services how the post-foster care scheme in their respective nation/s of the UK could be improved to better meet the needs of young people. Like foster carers, the top theme in

"Ensure carers are not at a financial detriment until young person is 25 in all cases. Make single payments direct to carers and not penalise young people for working or having to pay carers. This fits more realistically with what happens in families in the wider population."

their responses was **finances (60%)**. The next most common themes were issues around **processes (30%)**, including a lack of clarity; **planning (21%)**, including transition planning for individual young people, and planning at a service level; and **timings (11%)**, including calls to extend post-foster care beyond the age of 21 and introduce greater flexibility.

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Legislate and provide funding to increase the maximum age for foster care to age 25 to enable young people to stay with their foster families for longer, improving transitions.
- Introduce a national fee framework and a national minimum allowance for young people aged 18-25 in foster care, to ensure no young person has to claim benefits or pay their foster carers to remain living with them past the age of 18.
- Introduce a 'right to return' to foster care for young people aged 18-24 who leave their foster families and wish to return, where feasible for the family.
- Legislate to make care experience a protected characteristic.

Placing authorities and fostering services should:

- Ensure planning for individual young people's transitions out of care begins as early as possible, with foster carers fully informed of the process from the outset.
- At a strategic level, incorporate an assumption in favour of young people remaining with their foster families up to age 25 into budget and resource planning.

Fostering services should:

- Maintain financial and other support for foster carers at the same level whether they are caring for a child under 18 or a young person aged 18-25. Ensure young people are never expected to contribute to their own allowance.

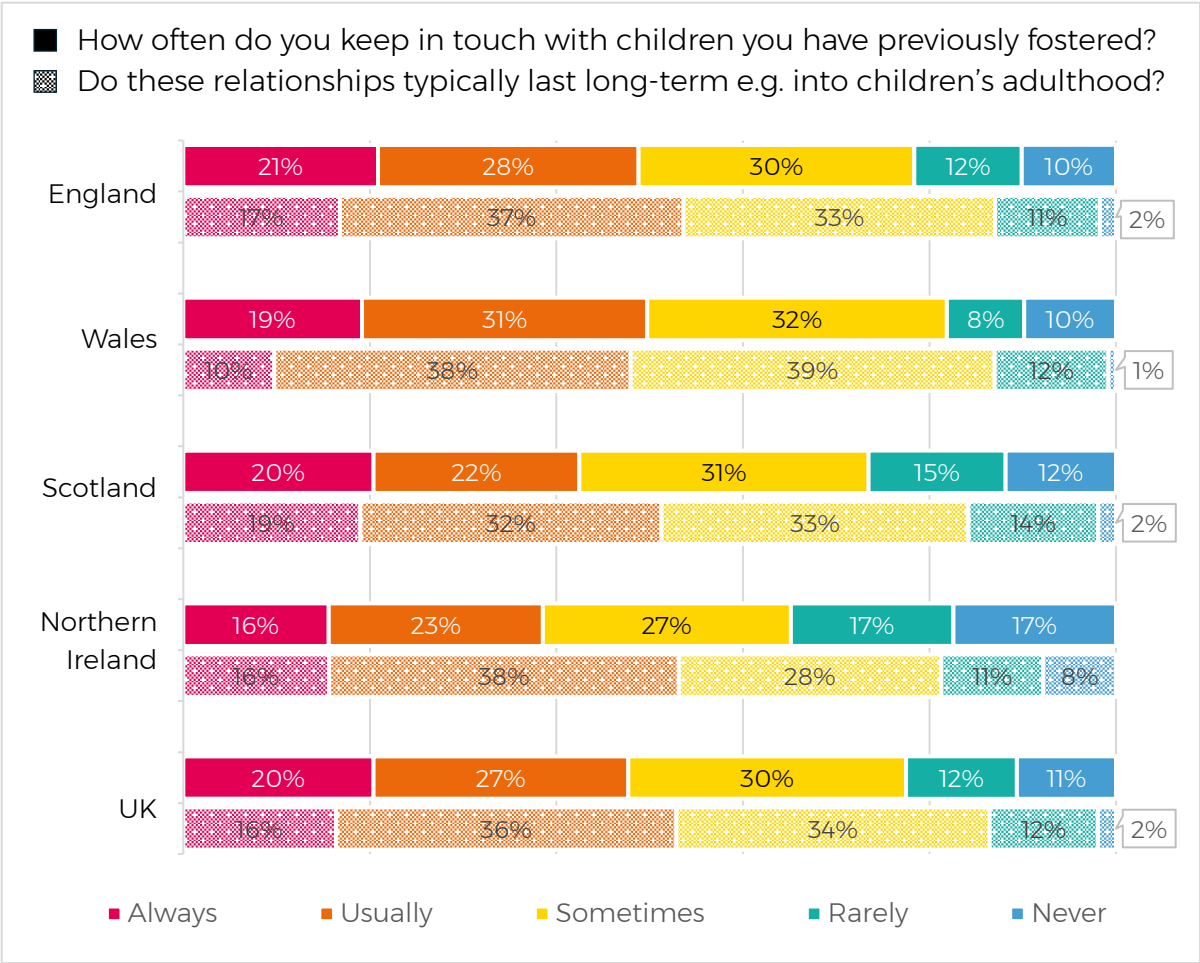
Keeping in touch

Children and young people’s relationships with their foster families are central to helping them feel safe and supported when they can’t live with their birth family. When a child moves on from a foster family, whether back to their birth family, to another care arrangement or into adulthood, they should be able to maintain their relationship with their former foster family for as long as they want to. Contrary to previously held myths, children can hold multiple caregiver attachments, and cutting previous carers out of their lives is both unnecessary and harmful, causing loss and potentially separation issues.

Despite this, less than half (48%) of foster carers we surveyed in 2024 said they always or usually keep in touch with children they have previously fostered. This is only a slight increase from 45% in 2021.

Less than half of foster carers always or usually keep in touch with children they have previously fostered.

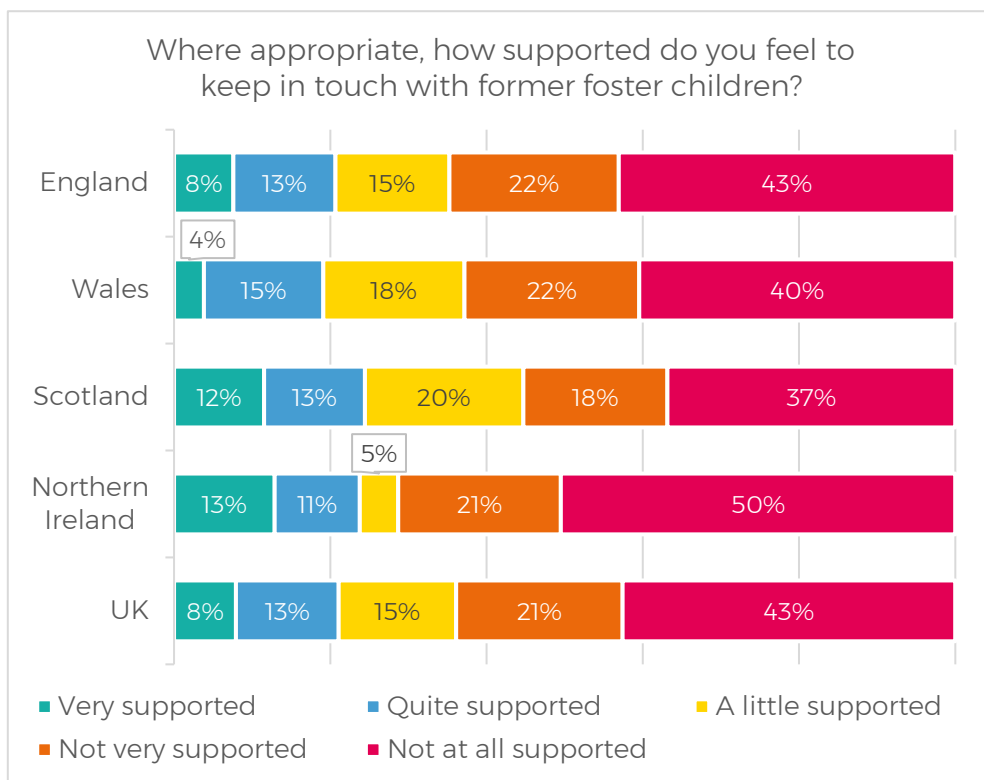
For the first time in 2024 we also asked foster carers (excluding those who never keep in touch) how long their relationships with former foster children typically last. **Just over half (53%) said these relationships always or usually last long-term**, for example, into the children’s adulthood.



Support to keep in touch

On average across the UK, only a fifth (21%) of foster carers said they feel very or quite supported to keep in touch with former foster children where appropriate. Foster carers in Scotland felt the most supported to keep in touch, while those in Northern Ireland felt the least supported.

We also asked fostering services what they do to support children's relationships with their former foster families after they move on.



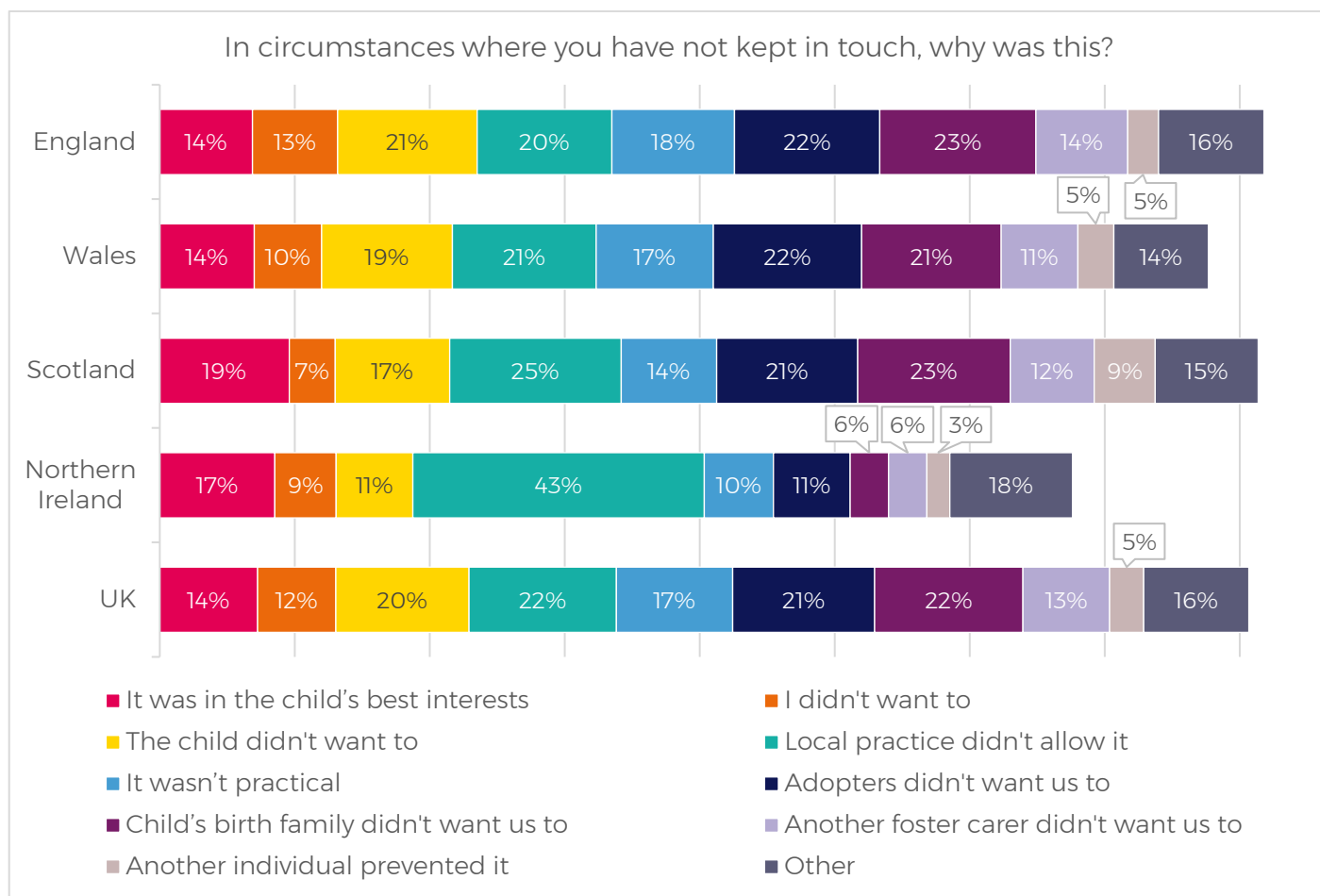
- **83% of respondents said they discuss ongoing relationships**, including with foster carers, at transition planning. This has increased from 69% in 2021.
- **Only a third (35%) said their service provides training** to foster carers on keeping in touch with children, although this has increased from a quarter (24%) in 2021.
- **Less than a quarter (23%) said they provide paid leave** (a 'retainer') to foster carers between placements to support transitions, the same as in 2021.
- **16% said their service provides expenses** to facilitate ongoing relationships, down from 22% in 2021.
- **16% said their service has a policy on maintaining relationships** between children and their former foster carers after they move on, up from 12% in 2021.
- **Less than one in ten (9%) said they have signed up to the Keep Connected principles**, up from 4%.

Fostering services in Scotland were more likely to say they provide training, paid leave, expenses, and have signed up to the Keep Connected Principles. Fostering services in Wales were less likely to report providing training and paid leave, but were more likely to say they discuss ongoing relationships, including with foster carers, at transition planning.

Reasons for not keeping in touch

We asked foster carers why they haven't kept in touch with children they previously fostered, if applicable. The most common reasons for not keeping in touch were that local practice didn't allow it (22%); the child's birth family (22%) or adopters (21%) didn't want the child and their former foster carer to keep in touch; or the child themselves didn't want to keep in touch (20%). These are very similar to the top reasons for not keeping in touch in 2021, although the role of birth family in preventing children and foster carers from keeping in touch seems to have increased.

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024



As shown, foster carers in Northern Ireland were more likely to say that local practice didn't allow them to keep in touch, and less likely to say the child's birth family, adopters, or the child themselves didn't want to keep in touch.

Comments on keeping in touch

Foster carers were able to add further comment if they had anything else to say about keeping in touch with children or young people they have previously fostered. In their comments, the most frequent themes were:

- **Wanting to keep in touch (38%)** – foster carers value keeping in touch and see former foster children as part of the family.
- **Obstacles to keeping in touch (22%)** – services don't encourage or support keeping in touch, or actively prevent it.
- **Benefits of keeping in touch (16%)** – keeping in touch is important so children don't feel abandoned, for their understanding of their life story, and for their wellbeing.

"It seems our local authority doesn't really want us to keep in touch. I have never been asked or encouraged to keep in touch with the children who have moved on, even when we have asked about them. Our long term children, some now in their 30s, are still part of our family and usually come to tea once a week and even come on holiday with us every year."

"We have found that our ongoing contact with our previous foster children has proved to be as important as their time living with us."

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

- **Poor experiences with keeping in touch (12%)** – foster carers described a lack of support, decisions not being made in children's best interests, and broken promises.
- Perceptions that it is **up to new carers** whether children keep in touch with their former foster carers (9%).
- **Principles and beliefs** about keeping in touch (8%) – such as that it should be child led.
- **Reasons for not keeping in touch (6%)** – it isn't always appropriate, sensitivity is required to new carers, and it can be better to have a fresh start or move on.
- The **impact of not keeping in touch (6%)** – on children, who feel abandoned, and on carers, who grieve children who move on.

"I believe social services should make more effort to support keeping in touch. It is difficult for a child to believe you really cared for them when they move from your home and they have no contact from carers again."

"I think it's always in the child's best interest to have some form of contact or to know it's possible. For the fostering family especially the children it can be a massive heartbreaking loss and our experience is that the grief is always there along with the worry about how they are as nothing is fed back to update us. Absolutely devastated that kids think we hand them over and then forget about them. Shame on everyone involved."

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Produce statutory guidance to support children and young people's ongoing relationships with people that matter to them, including their former foster families where appropriate.

Placing authorities and fostering services should:

- Include foster carers in all aspects of the planning process, including planning meetings, to ensure they are involved in discussions about keeping in touch.
- Centre children's views and wishes at the heart of decisions on keeping in touch.
- Sign up to and embed our Keep Connected principles, ensuring all staff within the service receive training and understand the importance of being able to keep in touch with former foster families. Discuss keeping in touch in transition planning and ensure children's new carers understand the importance of keeping in touch.

Fostering services should:

- Provide financial support for foster carers to support transitions and ongoing relationships with former foster children.
- Provide foster carers with training on transitions and the importance of ongoing relationships with former foster children.

Part Four: The System

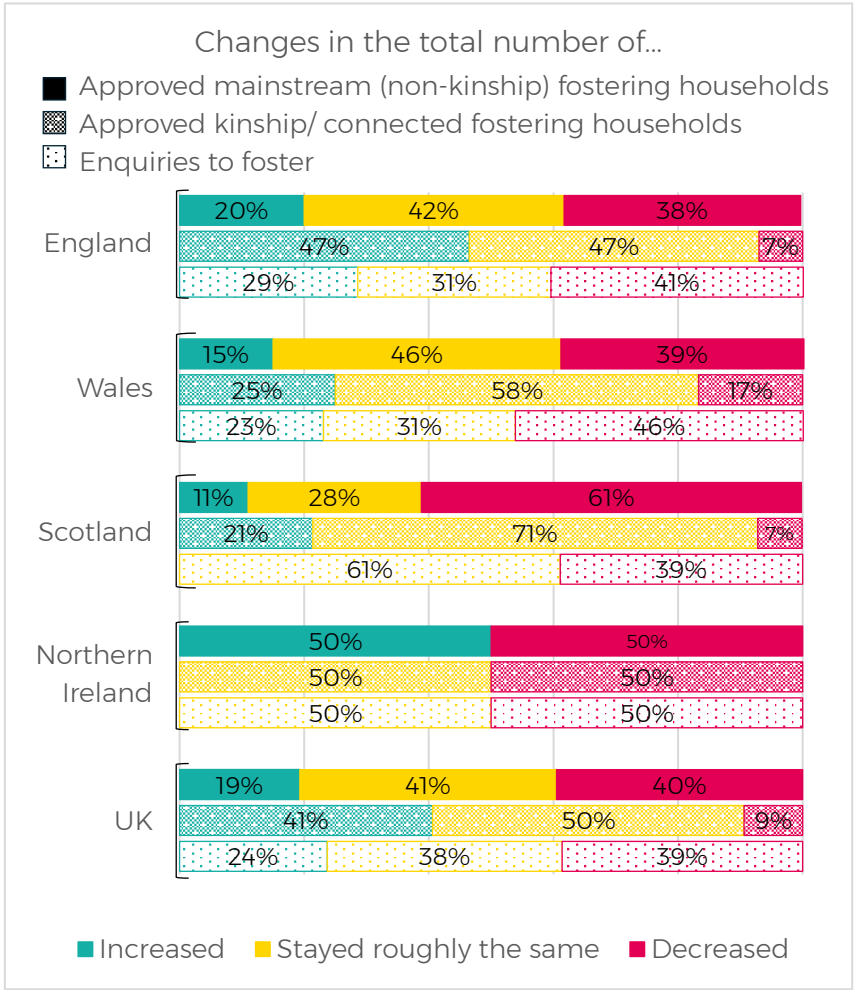
The previous sections of this report focus on day-to-day aspects of fostering, from matching and training, to support and endings. This section looks at major issues in the fostering system including the widespread lack of foster carers, and considers foster carers' and fostering services' views on what we need to do to retain more carers.

Shortages of foster carers

The longstanding shortages of foster carers across the UK are arguably the clearest indicator of a sector in crisis. Every year we lose more foster carers than we gain, and the findings of this survey support this; in 2024, most fostering services that responded to the survey said **the total number of approved mainstream fostering households in their service has decreased (40%) or stayed roughly the same (41%)** in the last year, while only a fifth (19%) said it has increased. Similarly, most services reported a **decrease (39%) or no change (38%) in the number of enquiries to foster**; a quarter (24%) reported an increase.

However, respondents were more likely to say **the total number of approved kinship/ connected fostering households in their service has stayed roughly the same (50%) or increased (41%)** than decreased (9%) in the last year, potentially reflecting a shift towards prioritising kinship care for children where possible.

All but one fostering service said there is a shortage of foster carers to meet the needs of the children in their local population, up from all but six in 2021. Additionally, **91% said their service is experiencing a shortage of foster carers for children with particular needs**, such as their age, health or siblings – up from 82% in 2021.



All but one service said there is a shortage of foster carers in their local population.

Retention

This report started with the recruitment of foster carers, as the first stage in their journey. However, the retention of foster carers is just as important, if not more so, to address the current shortages of foster carers in each nation.

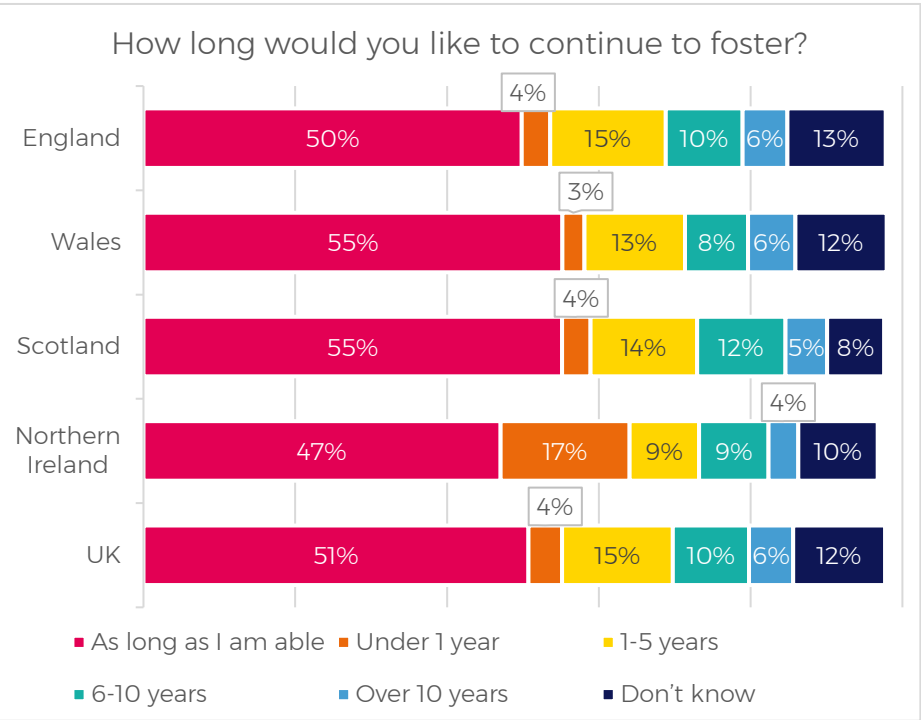
Fostering services' approaches to retention

We asked fostering services to share the most effective thing they do to retain foster carers. Of 106 comments, the key themes were:

- **Support (78%)**, including specialist or therapeutic support, events and activities, groups and peer support, good supervision, and the Mockingbird programme.
- **Training (27%)**.
- **Finances (21%)**, including fees, allowances and council tax exemption.
- **Structural factors (18%)** – consistent staff, small size of agency, and low caseloads.
- **Relationship-based practice (13%)**, particularly foster carers' relationships with their supervising social workers.
- **Treatment of foster carers (13%)** – valuing, respecting and listening to them.
- **Involvement of foster carers (8%)**, including consultation and acting on their views.

These are similar to our findings in 2021, when the top themes in responses to this question were support, valuing foster carers, relationships with the team around the child, finances, and training. Structural factors around staffing and agency size, and the involvement of foster carers, emerged as new themes in 2024.

Foster carers' intentions to continue fostering



Around half (51%) of foster carers said they will continue fostering for as long as they can, up from 46% in 2021. This was slightly higher in Wales and Scotland, and lower in Northern Ireland. Only 4% said they would like to continue fostering for under a year, a slight increase from 3% in 2021, but this was considerably higher in Northern Ireland. 6% said they would like to continue for over ten years, down from 10% in 2021.

Notably, in response to the question 'what motivates you to foster?' (see Recruitment for

State of the Nations’ Foster Care 2024

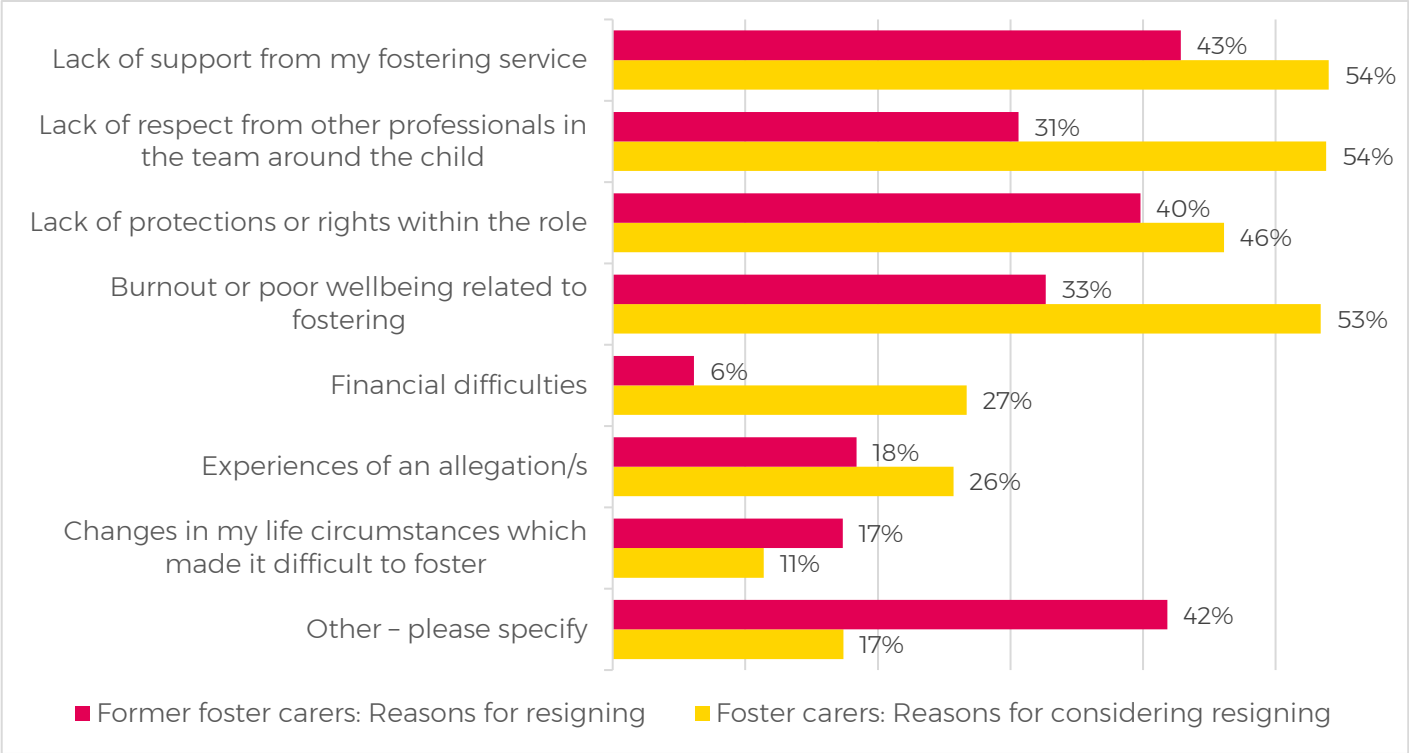
discussion of motivations to start fostering), 66% of foster carers selected ‘I am committed to the children I am currently fostering’ as a key motivation.

However, 60% of foster carers said they have either considered (46%) or are still considering (14%) resigning from fostering.⁶ Foster carers in Scotland were less likely to have considered resigning (41%) but as likely to still be considering it (14%). Those in Wales were less likely (11%), and those in Northern Ireland more likely (23%), to still be considering it.

Mockingbird foster carers were significantly more likely to say they have never considered resigning from fostering (49%) than other foster carers (39%).

Reasons for (considering) stopping fostering

The most common reasons foster carers selected for considering resigning from fostering were: a **lack of support** from their fostering service (54%); a **lack of respect** from other professionals (54%); and **burnout or poor wellbeing** related to fostering (53%). In 2024 we also surveyed former foster carers for the first time, and these were some of the most common factors they identified as having contributed to them resigning (43%, 31% and 33% respectively), as well as a lack of rights and protections within the role (40%).



⁶ In our 2021 survey we included ‘I am considering giving up fostering’ as an option within our multiple choice question on motivations to foster (a ‘select all that apply’ question), and it was selected by 10% of respondents. However, in 2024, we asked respondents explicitly whether they have considered, are still considering, or have never considered resigning from fostering (a ‘forced choice’ question), and 14% said they are still considering it. [Evidence](#) shows that forced choice questions yield more accurate results than ‘select all that apply’ questions, and particularly that people are more likely to accurately report having experienced something if they are asked about it through a forced choice question than through a select all that apply question. This means it’s likely that the higher proportion of respondents saying they have considered resigning from fostering in 2024 is at least partly due to the way the question was asked, and the findings from 2024 and 2021 are not necessarily comparable.

Support

Looking at the specific areas of support former foster carers were lacking, responses to the rest of the survey reveal that **former foster carers rated the support they received for their fostering less highly than current foster carers** for all sources of support. The largest differences were in relation to support from supervising social workers (47% of former foster carers rated this as excellent or good, compared to 74% of current foster carers), and the fostering service in general (20%, compared to 51%).

Former foster carers were also less likely to say they had access to an approved support network/ person who could provide overnight care for the children they fostered (30%, compared to 48% of current foster carers).

Among current foster carers, those who rated their support more highly, and those with access to an approved support network/ person who can provide overnight care for the children they foster, were significantly less likely to consider resigning.

Rights and protections

Over half (52%) of former foster carers felt they had no rights or protections in the role, compared to a third (34%) of current foster carers. A similar proportion said they felt they didn't have many rights and protections (25%, compared to 28%).

Like current foster carers, when asked what rights and protections they feel they should have, former foster carers most frequently commented on their conditions and treatment (37%), rights and protections around allegations (24%), and finances (17%).

Burnout and poor wellbeing

Former foster carers were both more likely to have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing related to their fostering (73%, compared to 58% of current foster carers) and less likely to say they felt able to ask for support for their wellbeing, without fear of consequences for themselves or the children in their care (28%, compared to 48% of current foster carers).

Current foster carers who have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing were almost seven times more likely to consider resigning, while those who feel able to ask for wellbeing support were significantly less likely to consider resigning.

Respect from other professionals

Former foster carers were less likely than current foster carers to say they felt treated as an equal and valued member of the team around the child by each of the professionals we listed. This difference was particularly stark in relation to supervising social workers (51% of former foster carers said they always or usually felt treated as equal and valued by them, compared to 76% of current foster carers) and children's social workers (30%, compared to 53%).

Allegations

Although allegations were not a top reason former foster carers said they stopped fostering, responses to the allegations questions show that **former foster carers were twice as likely to have experienced an allegation in the previous two years (28%)** than current foster carers (14%). This indicates that while their experience of an allegation/s may not have directly contributed to them

stopping fostering, it likely impacted their wellbeing and feelings about their rights, protections and status. Current foster carers who have experienced an allegation/s were also significantly more likely to consider resigning.

Other factors affecting the likelihood of considering resigning

Among current foster carers, the likelihood of considering resigning was also significantly lower for those who:

- Feel more supported to keep in touch with children they previously fostered.
- Foster for a service with a foster carers' charter.
- Are more often invited to meetings with health professionals, teachers, and to care planning and review meetings.

Exit interviews

When a foster carer does resign from fostering, exit interviews are an important way for services to understand what caused them to leave, and to consider anything that could have prevented this, where appropriate. However, the proportion of services that always offer an exit interview has decreased since 2021. Fostering services in Wales were most likely to say they always offer an exit interview when a foster carer leaves (77%), compared to services in England (61%), Scotland (56%) and Northern Ireland (one of two services).

Four in five fostering services (62%) always offer an exit interview when a foster carer leaves, down from 71% in 2021.

On average, fostering services reported that 57% of their outgoing foster carers engage in an exit interview, ranging from 43% in Scotland, to 55% in Wales and 58% in England (neither service in Northern Ireland answered this question).

When asked how the information gathered in exit interviews is used in future planning, around one in ten fostering services referenced specific plans including recruitment strategies, action plans and business plans. However, a higher proportion (44%) said the information gathered is used to inform practice or shape service development or improvement. Others said the information is discussed in meetings (15%), shared within their teams or with senior management (14%), or fed into reporting (9%), while 8% said they don't know how the information is used.

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Invest in the areas that underpin better retention of foster carers, such as finances, learning and development, and better peer support, including through the Mockingbird programme.

Fostering services should:

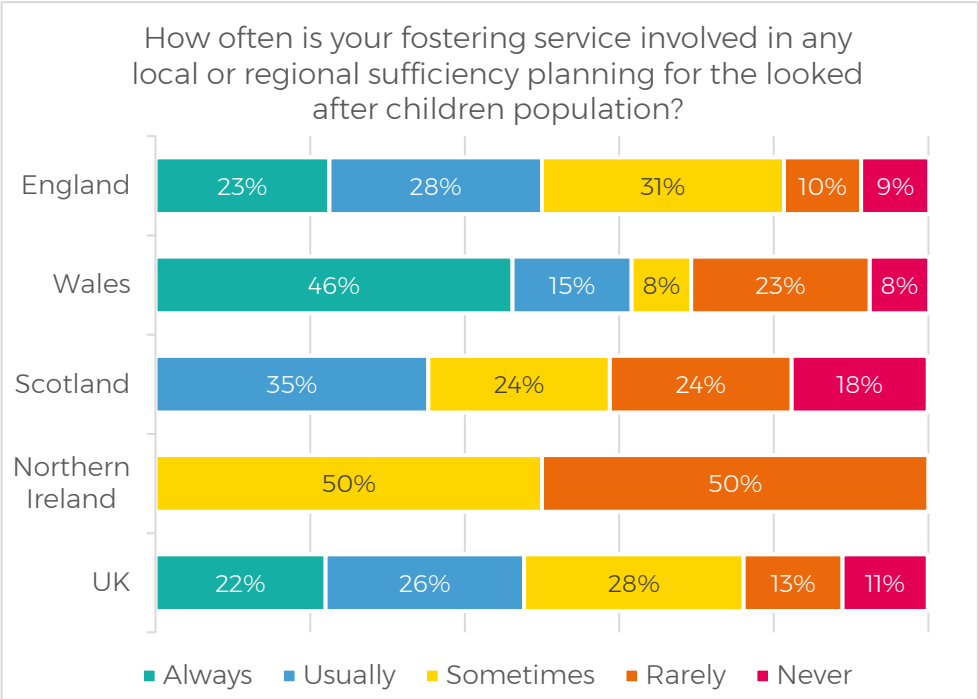
- Prioritise improved support for foster carers, including therapeutic and peer support.
- Take action to improve foster carers' status (see Status).
- Offer an exit interview to all foster carers who resign or transfer from the service, and use the information gathered to inform retention planning as well as service improvement.

Sufficiency planning

In addition to the changes recommended throughout this report, tackling shortages of foster carers requires thorough, ongoing and collaborative planning on the part of services, local authorities and national governments.

Of fostering services that completed our survey in 2024, **86% said their service has a fostering recruitment and retention strategy**, ranging from 50% (one of two respondents) in Northern Ireland, to 78% in Scotland, 88% in England, and 100% in Wales.

Less than half (48%) of services said they are always (22%) or usually (26%) involved in any local or regional sufficiency planning for the looked after children population. This is very similar to our findings from 2021, when 20% were always and 28% usually involved. In 2024, services operating in Wales were more likely to report being involved, while those in Scotland and Northern Ireland were less likely.

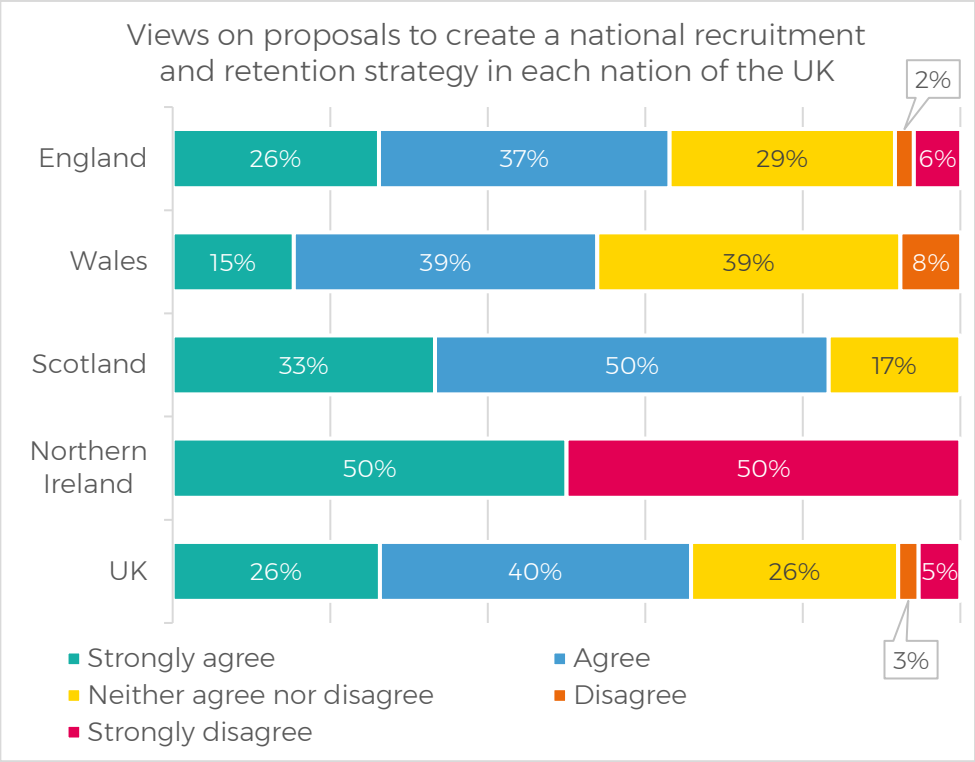


When asked what would help improve sufficiency planning, the most common theme respondents mentioned in comments was **joined up working**, particularly between local authorities and independent agencies. The next most common theme was **finances**, including more funding for carers, and managing or capping fees in the private sector. Other suggestions were better **support for foster carers**, better **planning and forecasting** of need, better **marketing** campaigns, and greater or continued **regionalisation** of resources and recruitment efforts.

Proposals for a national recruitment and retention strategy

Most fostering services (66%) said they agree or strongly agree with proposals to create a national fostering recruitment and retention strategy in each nation of the UK. Support was higher in Scotland and lower in Wales. Views were split between the two services in Northern Ireland.

State of the Nations’ Foster Care 2024



Recommendations

Governments should:

- Create a national recruitment and retention strategy in each nation of the UK.

Placing authorities should:

- Conduct an annual needs analysis of the local looked after children population in collaboration with other local authorities in the region.

Fostering services should:

- Collaborate with other services to create regional recruitment and retention plans.

Support care models

While more foster carers are urgently needed to address current gaps in provision, our long-term ambition across the UK should be to reduce the need for foster care altogether by keeping more children at home with their families, where it is safe to do so. Alongside wider work to tackle poverty, improve whole family wellbeing and increase access to vital public services, foster care has an important role to play in the prevention agenda, but in a different form.

'Support care' is a type of fostering in which specialist foster carers offer part-time care to children and their families to help prevent children from being taken into full-time, state care. It can provide a lifeline to families in need, but provision is still limited across the UK: only 17% of fostering services told us they provide a support care programme. However, a further 33% said they would like to.

Of the fifteen services that provided detail on the support care programmes their service offers, seven (47%) said they provide short breaks to families whose children are at risk of being looked after. Three (20%) simply said that they or the local children's social work department have an edge of care team or provide edge of care support.

The Fostering Network's Step Up Step Down programme

[Step Up Step Down](#) (SUSD) is a pioneering approach to supporting families on the edge of care, which reduces the number of children coming into care, improves outcomes for children and families, and realises long-term cost benefits to local children's services. The programme gives parents the support of a specialist, highly trained Family Support Foster Carer who can 'step up' when the parents need it and 'step down' when they are in a better place to look after their children. Support involves a combination of mentoring and training for parents, short breaks for children, and access to community services.

SUSD is currently operating in parts of Northern Ireland and Wales. Of the 205 children supported by the programme between 2016 and 2023, 95% remained at home and out of care. Every £1 invested through SUSD leads to cost savings of at least £1.50.

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Invest in the Step Up Step Down programme to support more families on the edge of care to safely stay together.

Views and attitudes on fostering

Across the UK, less than half (48%) of foster carers said they would recommend fostering to others who may be considering it, down from 54% in 2021. 35% responded 'maybe', up from 32% in 2021, and 17% said they wouldn't recommend it, up from 12%.

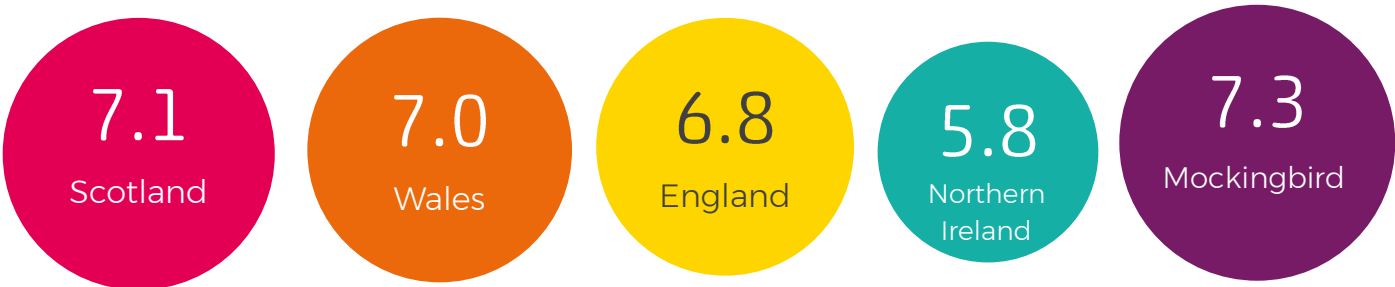
Less than half of foster carers said they would recommend fostering, while a third said maybe.

The proportion who would recommend fostering ranged from 43% in Northern Ireland, to 48% in both England and Wales, and 51% in Scotland. The proportion who would not recommend it was significantly higher in Northern Ireland than elsewhere, at 31%.

Mockingbird foster carers were significantly more likely to recommend fostering (61%) than other foster carers (45%).

On average across the UK, foster carers rated their experience of fostering as 6.8 out of 10, down from 7.1 out of 10 in 2021.

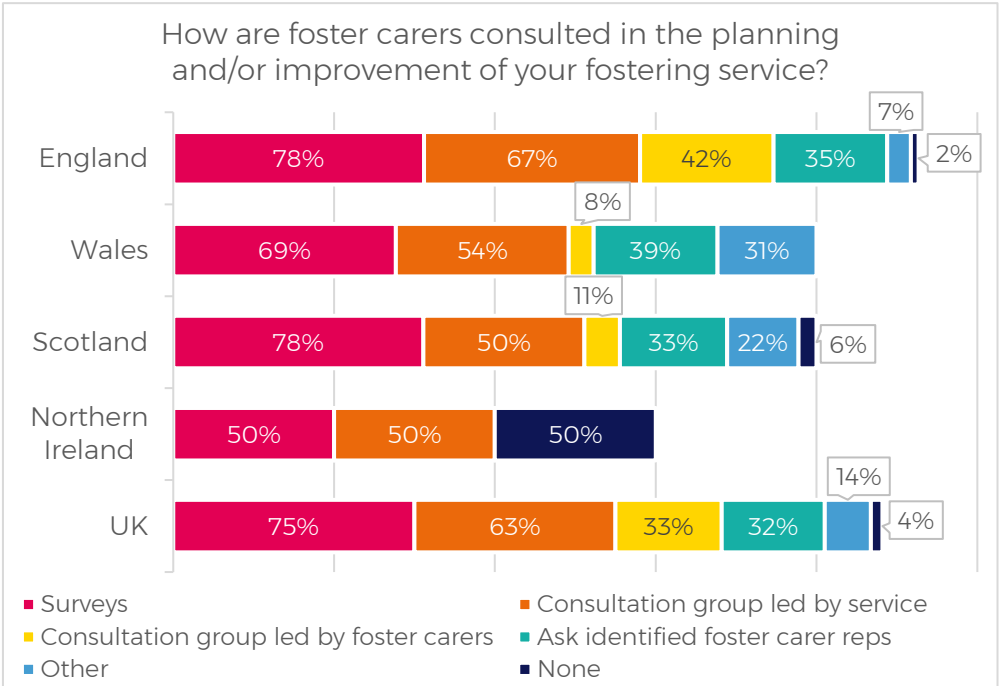
Mockingbird foster carers rated their experience significantly more highly, at 7.3 out of 10.



Consultation with foster carers

The most common way fostering services said they consult with their foster carers was using surveys (75%); the next most common way was using a consultation group led by the service (63%). These were also the two most common methods of consulting with carers in 2021 but were selected by fewer respondents then (67% and 56%, respectively).

Services in England were more likely to use a consultation group led by foster carers, including foster care associations, but this was still a minority. Across the UK, this fell slightly from 37% in 2021 to 33% in 2024. The proportion of services that said they consult with identified foster carer representatives also fell, from 39% in 2021 to 32% in 2024.



State of the Nations’ Foster Care 2024

In 2024 we also asked fostering services how often they consult with their foster carers. **Three quarters (74%) told us they consult with their foster carers at least twice a year.** Services in Scotland were less likely to say they consult with their foster carers over four times a year (28%) than those in Wales (39%), England (43%), Northern Ireland (one of two respondents), or the UK average (40%).

Improving foster care

We asked foster carers and fostering services what one main thing they think currently works well in fostering. Foster carers most frequently named positive relationships with social workers, and the fostering community – themselves and other foster carers – as things that work well, while fostering services referred to support for foster carers and elements of their own practice and processes as positives. Both groups also highlighted the positive impact of fostering on children and young people.

What one main thing do you think currently works well in fostering?	
Foster carers’ top responses	Fostering services’ top responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive relationships with social workers (21%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support for foster carers (41%), particularly peer support networks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The foster care community (13%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fostering services’ practice and processes (29%), including assessment, approval, matching, and teamwork within the service.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The impact of fostering on children and young people (9%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The impact of fostering on children and young people (27%).

“My current supervising social worker and my young person’s current social worker are excellent. They show me and the child respect, listen to us, and involve us in making decisions. Keep us updated and support me and the child when we need it.” – Foster carer

“Dedicated staff who use the PACE approach in working with carers and young people. Having a multi-disciplinary team with therapists and children’s workers, education worker who provide additional support.” – Fostering service

These findings were broadly similar to those from 2021, except that – crucially – the theme of support for foster carers, which appeared the most frequently in foster carers’ responses in 2021, was absent from the list in 2024. However, support remained the top theme for fostering services.

In responses to our question on the main thing respondents would like to see changed to make foster care better, both groups referred to finances, and the status of foster carers in the team around the child, as key priorities to change. Foster carers also highlighted support for foster carers and children, while fostering services identified aspects of the fostering system, as priorities. This is contrary to the fact that in the above question, services identified their own policies and processes as aspects of fostering that are working well – potentially indicating that they feel their efforts in these areas are in spite of wider systemic issues.

What one main thing would you like to see changed to make foster care better?	
Foster carers' top responses	Fostering services' top responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finances (24%), including financial support for foster carers and funding in general. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finances (38%), including financial support for foster carers and funding in general.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster carers' status and respect in the team around the child (23%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspects of the fostering system (36%), including matching, social workers' capacity and closer working.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for foster carers and children in care (16%), including access to short breaks and mental health support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster carers' status and respect in the team around the child (24%).

Since 2021, financial support and foster carers' status within the team around the child have remained key priorities for both foster carers and fostering services.

"Smaller caseloads for corporate parents. LA social workers have little time and are often over stretched to truly give the time necessary for the children who are placed in foster care. I have had to see too many changes in children's social workers due to them leaving the service due to burn out or moving on to better supported roles." – Foster carer

"The biggest issue our carers raise is around the fostering fees, this detracts from the excellent care they provide and puts a strain on the relationship between the agency and the carers - if there was a national fee set which each fostering agency signed up to, this would take fees off the table and we could all focus on the children." – Fostering service

"More targeted and robust support for the emotional and psychological needs of both foster children and foster parents. This would include expanded access to mental health services, regular emotional well-being checks, and more comprehensive training in trauma-informed care for all involved in foster care." – Foster carer

"To have proper support systems in place for all Foster Carers - such as fortnightly visits from Supervising Social Workers, access to therapeutic support, and a say in the running of their service." – Fostering service

"Listen to us the foster carers as we know the children best and offer the support they need. This will prevent breakdown of placements." – Foster carer

"More respect for carers as partners and as the best placed people to effect change for children." – Fostering service

"Foster carers need to feel more valued and all fees should be the same across the board." – Foster carer

Recommendations

Governments should:

- Increase fostering allowances in line with our [recommended rates](#), and introduce and fund a national fee framework (see Finances) and a national pension scheme for foster carers (see Status).
- Take steps to increase foster carers' status at a national level, including by highlighting their vital role through a national recruitment campaign (see Recruitment) and introducing and funding an independent national register of foster carers (see Status).

Fostering services should:

- Consult regularly with foster carers through a range of channels, including consultation groups led by foster carers, and foster carer representatives.
- Take steps to increase foster carers' status, including by supporting them to attend meetings about the children in their care, and introducing and upholding the commitments in a foster carers' charter (see Status).

Conclusion

Across many areas of fostering – including matching, learning and development, and finances – the evidence from this survey shows that foster carers' experiences, and by extension, those of the children and young people they foster, have worsened since 2021. On other issues such as allegations in fostering families, the findings continue to paint a challenging picture.

However, we've also seen examples of where the right support, particularly from supervising social workers, other foster carers, and through programmes like Mockingbird, can help foster carers to change children's lives. Respondents also shared their strong support for practical changes that would make a real difference for foster carers and children and young people. The following recommendations set out the changes we believe governments, placing authorities and fostering services should prioritise. See each section of the report for a full list of relevant recommendations.

Governments in each nation of the UK should:

- Create a national **recruitment and retention strategy** for foster care, and fund national foster carer **recruitment campaigns**, in each nation to increase the pool of available carers.
- Invest in the creation, implementation and monitoring of a **standardised framework for pre- and post-approval training** for foster carers in each nation.
- Introduce statutory 'opt-out' **maximum delegated authority** for foster carers to make day-to-day decisions on behalf of the children and young people they foster.
- Introduce a **register of foster carers** in each nation to increase foster carers' status and support matching of children with foster carers. Move responsibility for decisions about the removal of foster carers' approval to this body to increase independence.
- Address sufficiency issues within children and families social work teams, prioritising and financing targeted **social work recruitment** and regulation of caseloads.
- Invest in children's **mental health services** and **additional support for learning**.
- Fund **independent support services**, legal protection, representation and advocacy for all foster carers subject to an allegation, concern or complaint.
- Increase **allowances** to meet our [recommended rates](#) and introduce and fund a **national minimum fee framework**, with fees paid 52 weeks a year, and a **national pension scheme** for foster carers.
- Provide funding to increase the maximum age for post-foster care arrangements to age 25 to enable young people to stay with their foster families for longer, improving **transitions**.
- Produce statutory guidance to support children and young people's **ongoing relationships** with people that matter to them, including their former foster families where appropriate.
- Fund **innovative fostering programmes** that focus on prevention, retention and support, such as Mockingbird and Step Up Step Down.

Placing authorities should:

- Ensure children's profile information is collated by everyone who knows them best and is shared with fostering services to inform **high quality matching**.
- Put the views of children and young people at the centre of decisions on **family time** and **keeping in touch** with former foster carers.
- Ensure all children coming into care receive a **mental health assessment**.

Fostering services should:

- Ensure all necessary **matching information** about children is shared with potential carers, and children are informed about and have the opportunity to meet their new foster family, well in advance of any move.
- Provide **training** in a range of formats and at different times to increase attendance, focusing particularly on increasing uptake of training on trauma-informed care, and providing opportunities for more advanced training.
- Include detail on **day-to-day decisions** in care planning. Ensure foster carers are invited to, and supported at, care planning and review meetings.
- Prioritise improved **support for foster carers**, including therapeutic, peer, and out-of-hours support. Ensure all foster carers have access to an approved support network or person who can provide overnight care for the children they foster.

About the Data

Our 2024 State of the Nations' Foster Care survey was completed by 2,883 current foster carers, 169 former foster carers, and 114 fostering services. The current and former foster carers' surveys contained very similar questions, largely about individuals' experiences of fostering, while the services' survey focused more on practice within services. All three surveys were open from 2 May to 14 July 2024 and hosted online using Qualtrics. The surveys were shared with all The Fostering Network's members and promoted through our website, magazine, social media and e-newsletters.

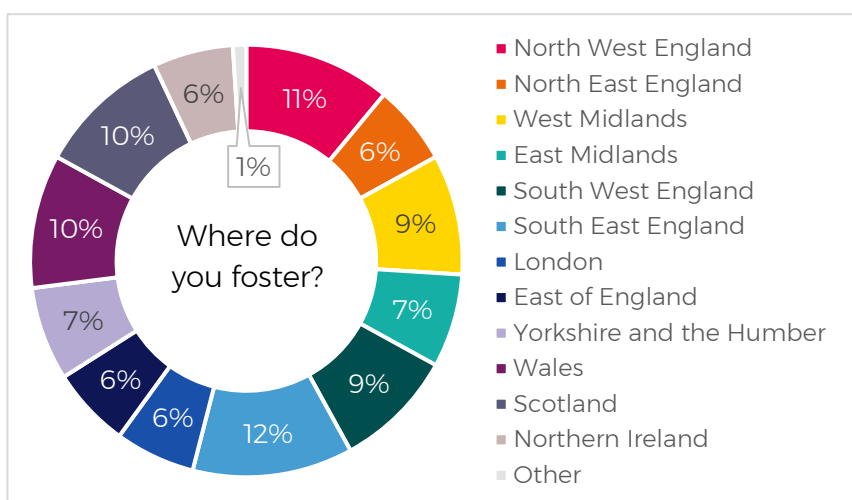
Findings were analysed with the support of two independent consultants. Thematic analysis was carried out using Microsoft Excel and Qualtrics, and statistical analysis using Qualtrics and SPSS. Throughout this report, where we refer to 'significant' relationships in data, this means statistically significant, as demonstrated by a statistical test.

About the foster carer respondents

Of all current foster carers who completed the survey, **74.4% lived in England, 9.6% in Wales, 10.0% in Scotland, and 6.0% in Northern Ireland**. Although a minority of respondents, foster carers in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were slightly overrepresented compared to the actual proportion of fostering households in these three nations of the UK.⁷

79.5% of respondents said they foster for a local authority, children's trust, or health and social care trust. This is higher than the actual proportion who foster for local authorities or trusts in the UK, which is around two thirds. The remaining respondents said they foster for an independent fostering provider, either for-profit (13.0%) or not-for-profit (7.5%).

88% of foster carers surveyed said they are a member of The Fostering Network, 6% said they are not, and 7% said they don't know.



Types of fostering

86.4% of respondents were mainstream foster carers and 13.6% were approved family and friends/ kinship foster carers (or pending approval); this is lower than the proportion of foster carers in the UK who are official kinship foster carers. The proportion of kinship foster carers responding to the survey was higher in Wales (26.4%) and Northern Ireland (24.9%) than in England (12.7%). Kinship care sits outside the fostering system in Scotland.

⁷ Of the 52,296 total fostering households in the UK, 42,615 (82%) live in England, 3,800 (7%) in Wales, 2,988 (6%) in Scotland, and 2,893 (6%) in Northern Ireland. See The Fostering Network (2025) [Fostering statistics](#)

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

7.9% of respondents were supporting young people in post-foster care arrangements. This proportion was higher in Scotland (11.9%) than in England (7.8%), Wales (4.7%) or Northern Ireland (7.5%). Across the UK, most post-foster carers were also approved as mainstream (87.2%) or kinship foster carers (8.8%).

41% of respondents were approved for both long-term and short-term fostering. 30% were approved only for long-term fostering and 29% only for short-term fostering.

The most common types of fostering respondents said they provided were **short break fostering (42%), emergency fostering (36%), and specialist therapeutic fostering (25%).**

Length of time fostering

Most respondents said they have been fostering for 1-5 years (34.0%), 6-10 years (23.8%) or 11-20 years (28.8%). A further 9.1% said they have been fostering for 21 years or more, and 4.4% said they have been fostering for under a year.

The average tenure in Scotland was longer, with fewer respondents saying they have been fostering for 1-5 years (23.8%) and more saying they have been fostering for 11-20 years (39.2%). The reverse was true in Northern Ireland, where 42.8% said they have been fostering for 1-5 years, and 18.5% for 11-20 years.

Family makeup

73.2% of respondents said they foster with their partner or another adult, and 26.0% said they foster on their own. Respondents were more likely to foster on their own in England (27.4%) and Northern Ireland (30.1%) than in Wales (20.3%) and Scotland (18.5%).

47.9% of mainstream foster carers said they were fostering one child, 30.1% were fostering two children, 13.5% were fostering three children, and 2.4% were fostering four or more children. 6.2% weren't fostering a child or young person at the time of the survey. Of those fostering at least two children or young people, 60.6% said this included a sibling group.

56.8% of family and friends/ kinship foster carers said they were fostering one child, 30.2% were fostering two children, 9.4% were fostering three children, and 2.6% were fostering four or more children. Only 1.0% were not fostering a child or young person at the time of the survey.

Most respondents said they have one (34.3%) or two (31.9%) birth children living with them. 14.5% said they have three or more birth children living with them, and a fifth (19.4%) said they have no birth children living with them.

About the fostering service respondents

Almost three quarters (73%) of fostering services that responded were registered in England, 10% in Wales, 16% in Scotland and 2% in Northern Ireland. Similarly, **75% of services operated in England,** 11% in Wales, 16% in Scotland, and 2% in Northern Ireland.

Four fifths (61%) of services were local authorities, children's trusts, or health and social care trusts; these organisations were therefore overrepresented, compared to their approximately 36% share of the UK's fostering sector. The remaining respondents were independent fostering providers, either for-profit (20%) or not-for-profit (20%).

State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024

93% of services that responded said they are a member of The Fostering Network and 7% said they are not.

The total number of fostering households approved by services that completed the survey was 15,120, representing around **29% of all fostering households** in the UK.

25% of those who completed the fostering services' survey on behalf of their service were fostering service managers; 18% were team managers; 15% were registered managers; and the remaining respondents had a variety of related roles.



The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity and membership organisation. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of children in foster care.

We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice.

We work to ensure all children and young people in foster care experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

We have been leading the fostering agenda for 50 years, influencing and shaping policy and practice at every level.

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