



Why foster carers care

how understanding values can transform relationships and improve services

the fostering network
the voice of foster care



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KEY FINDINGS

- Survey reveals many foster carers share a specific set of common values.
- Foster carer values are markedly different from those of the wider population.
- These values are characterised by the confidence and need to help in the local community.
- Values cut across the demographic spectrum.
- Opportunity for values-based targeting in foster care recruitment as well as service development strategies.
- Understanding values should influence fostering services' relationships with foster carers.
- The whole service offer can be better tailored to foster carer needs.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is part of a project funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and led by the Fostering Network.

This research was undertaken by the Fostering Network and iMPower Consulting. Its objective is to support fostering services to recruit sufficient foster carers according to the current and future needs of their looked-after children population by providing new intelligence on the values – the intrinsic motivations – of current foster carers.

The decision to foster is one of the most life-changing a person can make. Based on the premise that it is an individual's core values that underpin and drive such decisions, this research allows fostering services to shape their recruitment and retention offer around the specific values of foster carers, or those likely to consider fostering in the future, by better anticipating and responding to their needs and motivations.

This report sets out the key findings from a national survey of over 2,300 foster carers in England, with responses from foster carers across all regions and 130 local authority services, as well as those registered with independent fostering providers (IFPs).

The findings provide a new and innovative perspective on the ongoing challenge of foster carer recruitment while complementing the existing body of best practice evidence, including the Fostering Network's *Motivations to Foster* toolkit¹ and the *Understanding Attitudes, Motivations and Barriers to Adoption and Fostering* marketing proposal² commissioned by the DfE. This evidence is the first of its kind to provide a framework for understanding why foster carers care and how services can be shaped to better respond to those values. The insight it provides has important practice implications.

The survey is part of a wider project to deliver practical service development actions, including a national performance benchmark of local authority (LA) fostering services and support to 25 local authorities to consider the local improvement opportunities indicated by the research.



The key findings from this survey are:

- **Most foster carers share a common set of values.** They are principally motivated by an intrinsic desire to 'do the right thing' and to contribute to improving society.
- **These motivations hold true across the demographic spectrum and for foster carers registered with different fostering services.** They have powerful consequences for how the 'service offer' is targeted, developed and positioned.
- **To recruit more foster carers with these characteristics, and develop 'hard-to-place' capacity, fostering services should use this insight to:**

Re-work communications with foster carers, both in terms of message content and channels;

Involve foster carers more in recruitment and support activities to enhance their commitment and positive engagement;

Mobilise the potential of the foster carer team to access community groups;

Work collaboratively locally and regionally to co-ordinate messaging to maximise impact.

Many of the actions suggested by this report are low cost and low risk yet offer high returns, both in terms of enhancing services' recruitment capabilities, and improving the value for money invested in the service.

¹ www.fostering.net/motivations-foster-toolkit-fostering-services

² www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/fostercare/a00209484/research-about-fostering

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METHOD

An online survey was publicised widely to foster carers. It was sent electronically to over 10,000 members of the Fostering Network (20 per cent of the foster carer population) throughout May and June 2013. It was also advertised through newsletters, social media, emails and the Fostering Network's website. Fostering services were encouraged to promote the survey locally.

Based on a foster carer population of 50,000, the response level received provides a confidence level of 99 per cent with a confidence interval of 2.96. The sample is therefore taken to be representative and robust in statistical terms.

To segment the foster carer population by intrinsic motivations, a system called Values Modes was used. Values Modes is a proprietary system³, which categorises people into 12 discrete psychographic types, each group representing between seven per cent and 12 per cent of the population aged 15 years and over. The categorisation is based on responses to a short questionnaire which was included within the national survey. Values Modes is based on the psychological theory of motivation developed by Abraham Maslow and summarised in his Hierarchy of Needs. Within Maslow's hierarchy, three primary motivational levels are recognised – the Settler (Sustenance Driven), the Prospector (Outer Directed) and the Pioneer (Inner Directed).

The driving Settler (Sustenance Driven) needs are core physiological needs, safety and security and belonging. Some typical Settler characteristics are:

- Family and home, and caring for them, tend to be at the centre.
- For those living alone, friends take the place of family.
- Tradition and family structure are important.
- Prefer things to be 'normal'.
- Naturally conservative (with a small 'c').
- Security conscious - wary of crime, violence and terrorism.
- Supportive of tough punishment for criminals.
- Wary of change, especially for its own sake.
- More comfortable with regular and routine situations.
- Concerned about what the future holds.

This manifests in behaviours which are concerned with looking for rules with which to comply and normality with which to conform in order to acquire safety and security.

³ Developed, owned and licensed by Cultural Dynamics Strategy and Marketing Ltd

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The driving Prospector (Outer Directed) needs are the esteem of others and self-esteem. Some typical Prospector characteristics are:

- Success oriented.
- Always want to 'be the best' at what they are doing.
- Welcome opportunities to show their abilities.
- Take great pleasure in recognition and reward.
- Look to maximise opportunities.
- Will take opportunities for advancement and professional networking.
- Trend and fashion conscious.
- Like new ideas and new ways.
- Generally optimistic about the future.

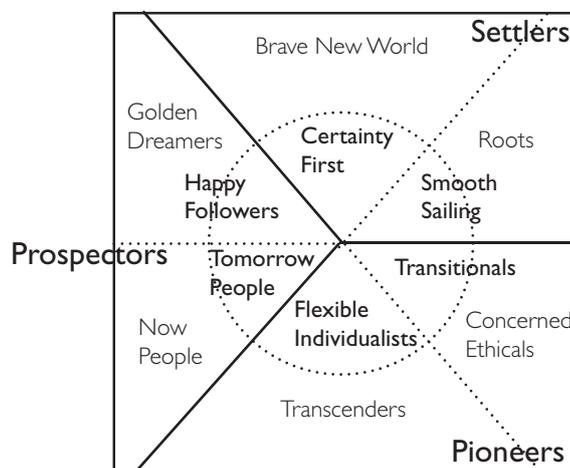
This manifests in behaviours which are concerned with competing successfully within a system in order to acquire reward, recognition and ultimately external affirmation.

The Pioneer (Inner Directed) needs are aesthetic cognitive and self-actualisation. Some typical Pioneer characteristics are:

- Trying to put things together and understand the big picture.
- Concerned about the environment, society, world poverty, and so on
- Always looking for new questions and answers.
- Strong internal sense of what is right and what is wrong.
- Strong desire for fairness, justice and equality.
- Self-assured and sense of self-agency.
- Generally positive about change, if it seems worthwhile.
- Cautiously optimistic about the future.

This manifests in behaviours which are concerned with breaking down (or putting up) barriers to realise what is perceived as 'the right thing'.

Within each of the three Values Modes, the system ascertains four different sub-groups. These provide a spectrum to identify individuals' character traits within each values segment, identifying the subtle differences within each Values Mode.



For more information visit cultdyn.co.uk

FINDINGS

Foster carer values

The significant majority of foster carers are Pioneers – 73 per cent against a national adult population average of 42 per cent, representing one of the most significant concentrations found in the history of Values Modes research.

Of the remaining 27 per cent of foster carers who are not Pioneers, 22 per cent are Prospectors and just five per cent are Settlers. Fourteen per cent have a Prospector Values Mode which is located on the Pioneer 'border' in terms of the values spectrum as illustrated on the previous page.

Pioneers have an intrinsic set of characteristics that include a concern about the world and societal issues; a strong internal sense of what is right and wrong as well as a strong desire for fairness, justice and equality. They also have high levels of self-efficacy and carry a strong belief that, whatever happens, they will manage.



Do you recognise this description of your foster carers?

Pioneers are therefore the first to respond to a call to action in the local community on the basis of a moral imperative – something that must happen because it is the right thing. The most common Values Modes Attributes among foster carers are also prevalent among charitable activists (as opposed to passive donors). These people are more likely to be concerned with, and active, in the local community and not surprisingly match the profile of those targeted by a number of national charities for voluntary work.



What might this mean for your recruitment strategy?

This finding – that a particular value set represents the most common ground among current foster carers – begs two immediate questions.

The first is whether there are many more Pioneers with the skills to foster or whether a 'saturation point' has been reached. Fostering services are successful in recruiting sufficient foster carers to mitigate the average 13 per cent that leave fostering annually. This finding suggests around 73 per cent are likely to be Pioneers. Pioneers represent 42 per cent of the national adult population. Clearly, while not all of this cohort will be well placed to take up fostering, it does give a sense of the opportunity. The recent research commissioned by the DfE appears to validate this.⁴

Second, is whether there are opportunities to recruit from the pool of other values cohorts. Prospectors and Settlers together make up the remaining 58 per cent of the national adult population, compared to only 27 per cent of the foster carer population. Does this representation gap indicate more could and should be done by services to speak to these values?



Should you be founding your engagement approach upon a particular values set?

A recruitment strategy which aims to attract people with Settler or Prospector values will certainly be very different to one shaped around those of Pioneers. Whichever strategy is employed locally, this finding therefore highlights the opportunities for values-based targeting. This in turn has powerful implications for the service

⁴ www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/fostercare/a00209484/research-about-fostering

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'proposition' and how prospective foster carers are engaged – from marketing activity and recruitment methods, through the journey to approval.

Pioneer

iMPOWER's projects with specific local authorities has also revealed a significant majority of existing foster carers with Pioneer values and services have generally used this finding to focus on the first opportunity – targeting Pioneers. These projects have shown that the value of the insight to attract more Pioneer foster carers will be most fully realised if it is applied locally and faithfully, with the teams responsible for delivering the service co-producing and implementing ideas, ideally alongside foster carers.

One of the clearest reasons why many existing foster carers have Pioneer values is the Pioneer desire to help and do the 'right' thing for the good of their environment. The breakdown of family relationships, destabilising the environment for the child, will resonate strongly with Pioneers and therefore encourage them to act.

Fostering services are likely to have had great success to date in recruiting foster carers with Pioneer values by including this persuasive message as part of their recruitment campaigns and the associated understanding of foster care from personal experiences. To attract more foster carers with Pioneer values, consider how you can tailor your message further; to maximise the call to action to this group.

Many fostering services issue recruitment information packs as a first action following an enquiry from a prospective foster carer. Pioneers, however, will value the opportunity to have an open conversation to discuss and ask questions on what fostering entails in order to decide if fostering is the 'right' thing for them to do. Clearly it isn't practical or a good use of resource to provide a home visit to every enquirer; however you may reconsider the structure of your information sessions to make best use of the opportunity for two-way dialogue.

As well as a desire to be communicated with directly, Pioneers also have a need to feel part of and contribute to the wider service. Consider therefore how your fostering service is introduced in your recruitment information, and the scope for how, when approved, foster carers can be involved in shaping the offer in order to attract more Pioneers to come forward.



How is your service set up to attract, recruit and retain foster carers with Pioneer values? Is your strategy to attract more Pioneer foster carers?

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Prospector

A Prospector-centred strategy on the other hand would have different features. As the findings have shown, just over one in five current foster carers are Prospectors, a sizeable minority. Evidently there are characteristics of being a foster carer that would attract people with this values set.

For instance the service might aim to focus on the success orientation of Prospectors by positioning the foster care role differently.

Only 15 per cent of looked-after children obtained five A*-C grades at GCSE including English and Maths in 2011⁵, compared to a national average of 58 per cent⁶. A foster carer with Prospector values may be in a strong position to help children in foster care achieve academically, for example lobbying harder for them to secure a place in the best local state school or the support they need. Prospectors' desire to 'be the best' and maximise opportunities might make them the perfect role model for a teenage fostered child.

To attract potential foster carers with Prospector values the offer might centre upon remuneration, the reputational benefits of a role model and opportunities for peer recognition and affirmation.

If a Prospector values recruitment strategy is considered, the service would need to understand how the needs of foster carers with this values set would differ from the existing majority, and whether new forms of support would be required.

Settler

A Settler-orientated recruitment strategy would differ still. Individuals who value stability and routine situations could be well placed to foster a child who would also value and benefit from these situations. Their values of placing such importance on family and home could provide the safe and supportive environment for a fostered child to thrive.

To attract potential foster carers with Settler values the offer might centre upon stability, and providing a secure family environment for long-term fostering placements.

If this type of recruitment strategy is considered, the service would need to decide if it can accommodate the needs and requirements of foster carers with Settler values to ensure they can fulfil all foster carer roles, including for example facilitating contact or managing challenging behaviour.



Could different values suit different placement requirements?

These are just some examples but it can be seen how this simple and shared view of the foster carer can help build a 'customer culture' and a targeted and consistent 'offer'.



The nature of a local authority's relationship with its foster carers is almost unique in the public sector. To what extent do you see foster carers as 'customers'?

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Retention

Finding that the significant majority of existing foster carers share Pioneer values also provides powerful insight and implications for the retention of foster carers.

A desire to be consulted, contribute to the wider development of the fostering service, and the additional insight presented above will also empower fostering services to better retain and develop their existing foster carer workforce through post-approval supervision and support.

Ultimately, this finding provides a new lens through which fostering services can better understand foster carers and their feedback, and a framework to help act on this improved understanding.



VALUES COMPARISONS ACROSS DIFFERENT COHORTS

Across foster carers registered with different fostering services

Pioneers are the dominant Maslow Group in all fostering services.



As we will go on to demonstrate, there are factors that influence a foster carer's choice of fostering service. However, this confirms that foster carers with Pioneer values are attracted by the moral imperative to foster across all sectors. LAs and IFPs attract the same small proportion of foster carers with Settler values. IFPs attract proportionately more foster carers with Prospector values, a five per cent greater population, than LAs.

It is often hypothesised that financial incentives are among the key reasons why foster carers choose an IFP over a LA. iMPOWER's local values projects have aimed to tease out the role and importance of financial incentives among Pioneers. In this work, for Pioneers, the financial package is typically cited as relatively unimportant as a primary motivation, illustrating the level of goodwill invested. Remuneration does become an issue however when Pioneers consider it 'unfair' - much like any other aspect of the service - as this offends more acutely their sense of 'right'. While for Prospectors, 'fair' is more likely to be defined by reference to market rates, the Pioneer perception appears more related to factors such as annual increases in allowances.

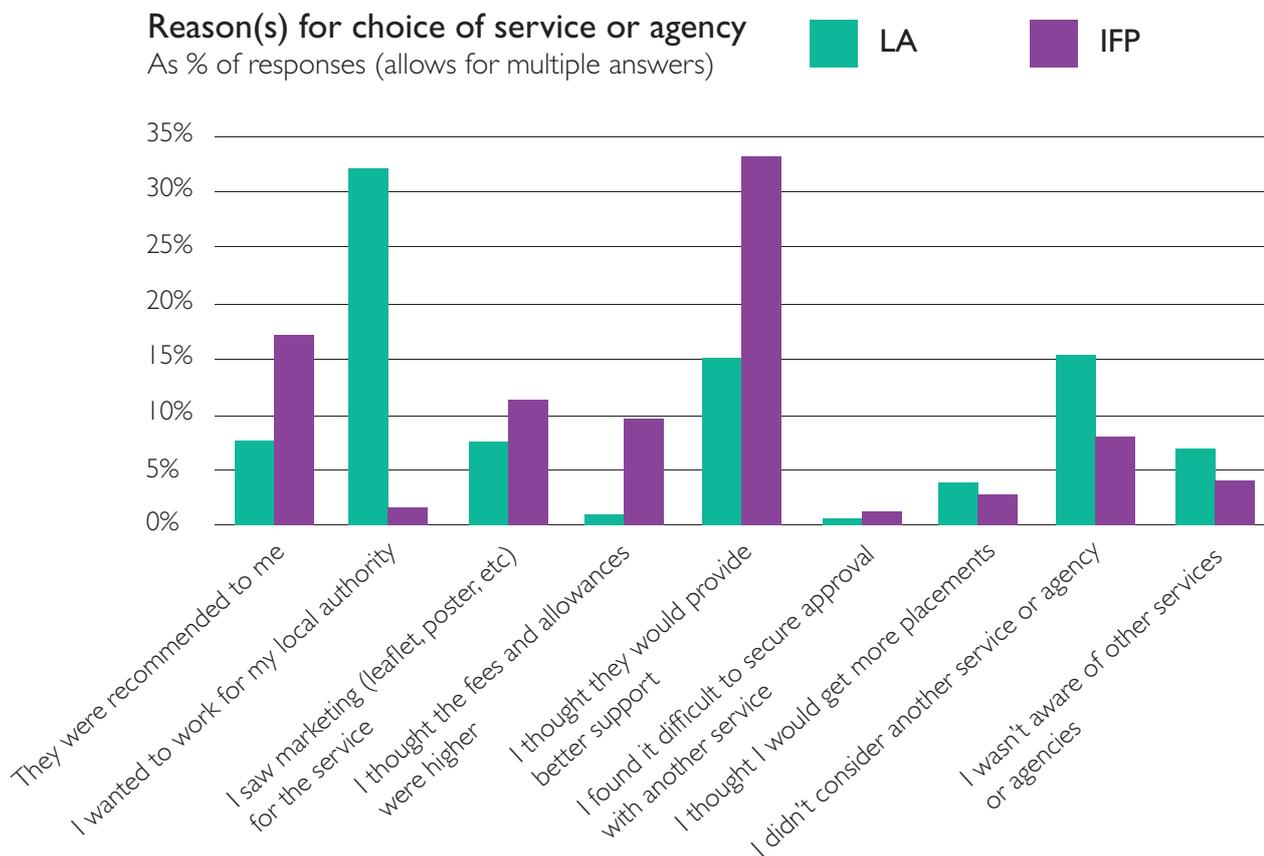


How do your foster carers define 'fair' remuneration?

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For Pioneers, a much more important factor is the outcome they are able to achieve. This motivation underpins what they value in a service or agency, what they look for and who they join.

This was borne out in a number of ways when the survey asked why foster carers chose their service or agency over alternatives.



First, foster carers' views of the support on offer is significant, more so than fees and allowances (further analysis confirms this is true across the demographic spectrum). Again, this follows from the values insight which anticipates prospective Pioneer foster carers to be primarily concerned with delivering positive outcomes. It is crucial though to be clear this is not the same as stating money is not important in a person's decision and ability to foster and to continue fostering.

Second, the value of the council 'brand' is clear. The desire to work for the LA is also consistent with Pioneer values, which associate the council with public good, the delivery of which is a central motivation behind their coming forward. Pioneers are though also attracted to work for IFPs, indicating the moral imperative to deliver public good through fostering applies across all sectors.

Third, word of mouth is seen as a key tool for recruiting more foster carers. The findings show that foster carers with IFPs are more likely to advocate for and recommend their fostering service to a prospective foster carer.



How does your service promote levels of support in your recruitment campaign? Is it tailored to a particular values set?

How can you best articulate that offer to Pioneers?

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Across demographic markers

In addition to a consistent skew of Pioneers across the public and private sector cohorts, the evidence also suggests the values mix remains broadly consistent across age, income and religion (see following graphs). That means that foster carers of all age groups are most likely to be Pioneers, as are foster carers of all religions and in every income bracket, whatever region or locality they live in.⁷

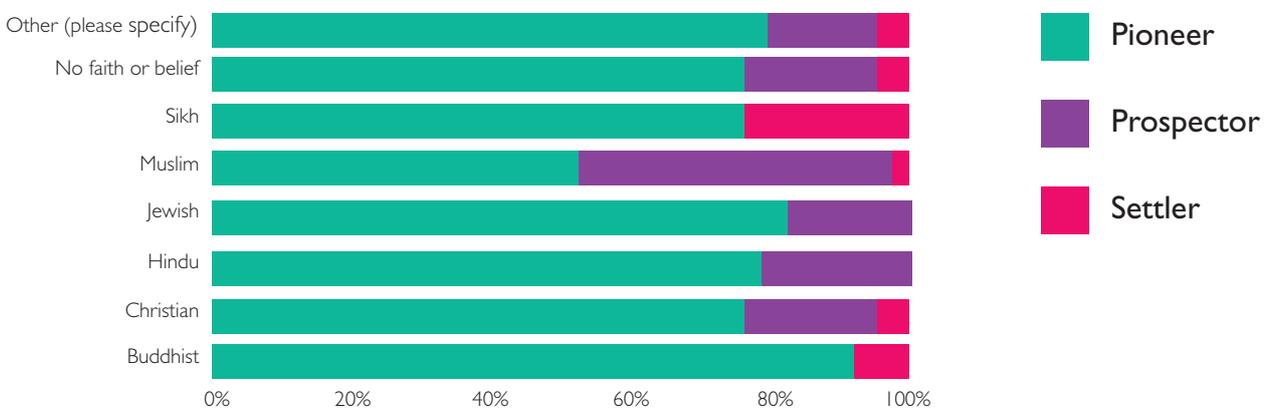
The importance of this finding is that it allows the values profiles of foster carer populations from different localities and in a variety of settings to be meaningfully compared. It also means that the methods used to target a particular values set in one council or area are likely to be successful when used elsewhere.

Whether the service targets higher or lower socio-economic populations, whether the setting is urban or rural, a values-centred service development strategy will follow the same principles and realise the same opportunities.

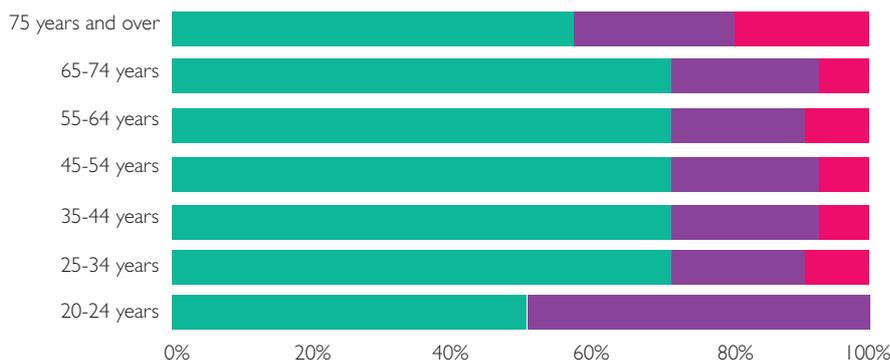


Do you already have a clear view of who you are targeting in demographic terms and when? How can this values insight help complete that strategy by building a consistent approach to what you say and how you say it?

Maslow Group and Religion



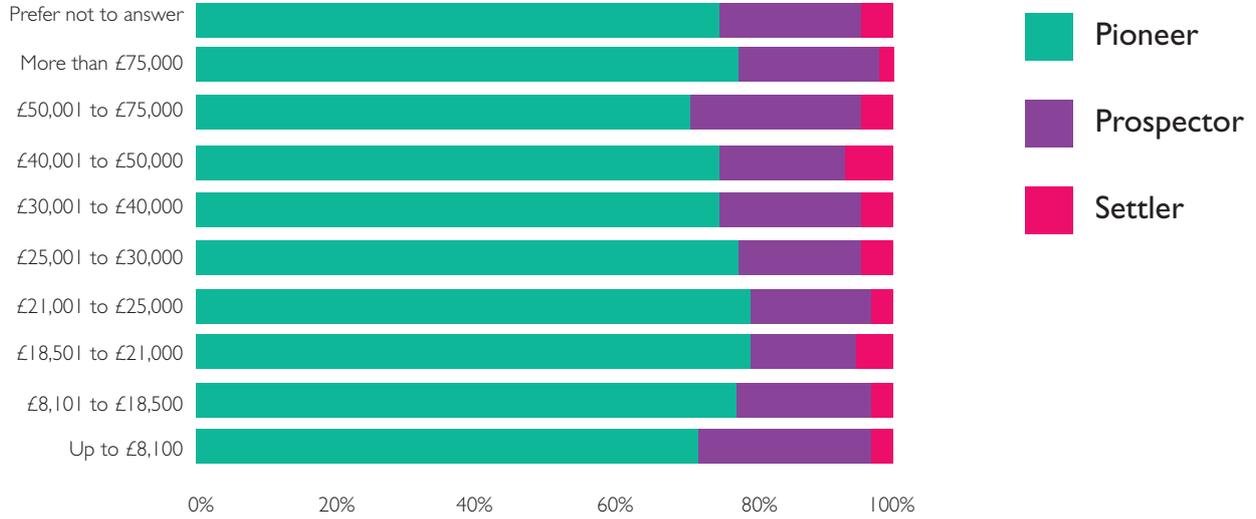
Age and Maslow Group



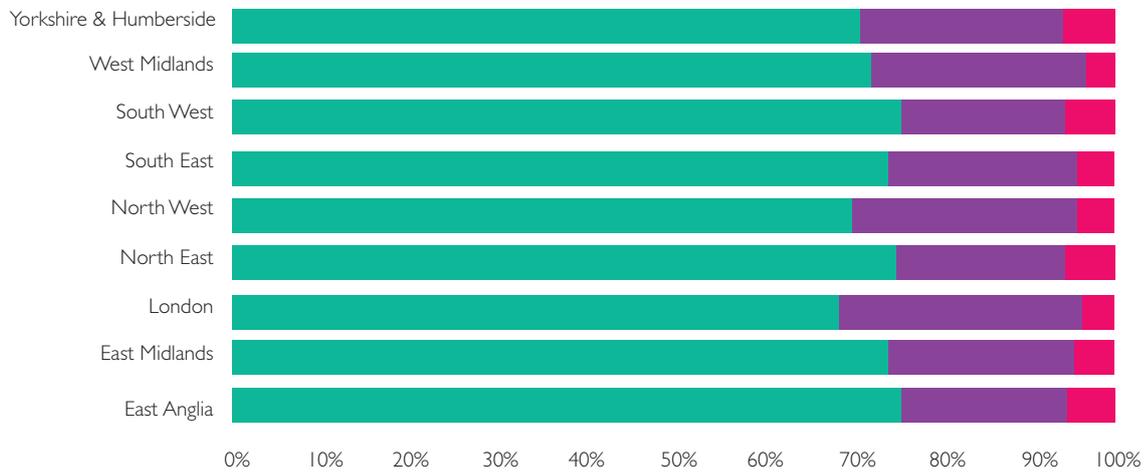
⁷ Note that the number of responses from those 24 and over 75 years was very low. These results cannot therefore be considered representative. Similarly, while most respondents selected a religion, the number choosing Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh were also low. Assertions regarding the characteristics of these cohorts must therefore be qualified.

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Income and Maslow Group

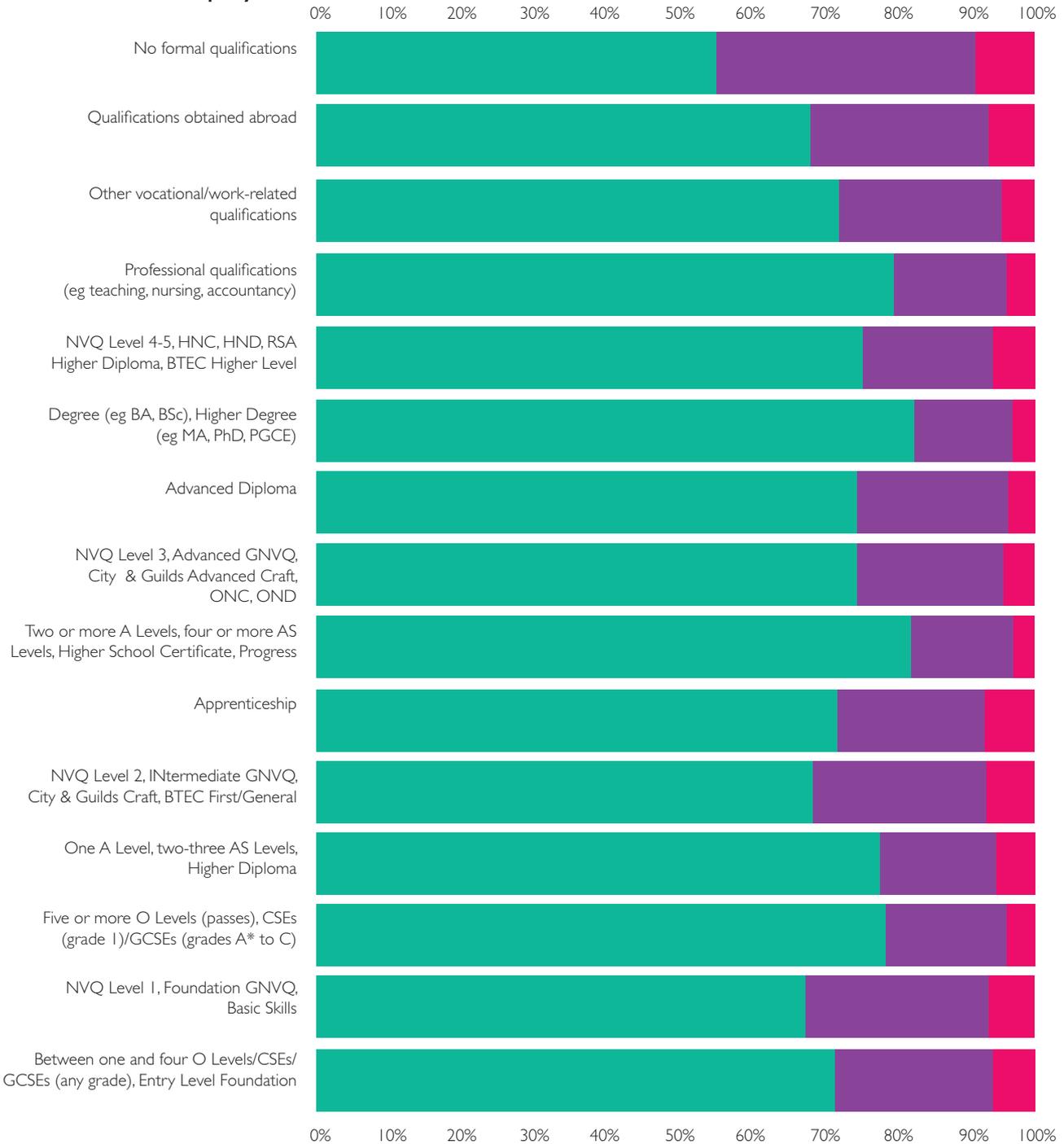


Maslow Group by Region



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Maslow Group by Qualification



CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR FOSTERING SERVICES' RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

This work highlights that the majority of existing foster carers have a common set of Pioneer values, a more significant skew than in any area analysed to date. Values cut across all demographic profiles including age, ethnicity, religion and household income. This finding has significant and positive implications for all fostering services.

Fostering services can use the values insight to develop a 'customer-focused' recruitment strategy that attracts more foster carers with Pioneer values.

Fostering services can also use this intelligence to develop recruitment campaigns that would attract prospective foster carers with a values set that is not locally, or indeed nationally, prevalent, but could provide foster care for children with specific needs.

In addition to recruitment, fostering services can shape their service in terms of messaging, communications and support provision to meet the needs of and develop existing foster carers.

Values insight can be utilised to increase the impact of local intelligence such as service-specific feedback by current foster carers or demographic targeting opportunities. It addresses the fundamental question of why foster carers care and applies irrespective of the demographic.

By completing local 'customer insight' work using this values method and assessing the needs of local looked-after children, fostering services can quickly validate these findings and develop toolkits to translate them into practical initiatives

This project will start to do so with 25 councils during 2013-15.

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APPENDIX: MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS AND VALUES MODES

The Maslow Groups and Values Modes defined by Cultural Dynamics Strategy and Marketing Limited ('CDSM') are derived from the British Values Survey which began in 1973 and, at the time of writing, were being conducted and updated by CDSM worldwide.

The British Values Survey is the largest and longest established survey of the values, beliefs and motivations of the British population – currently over 600 questions are measured in the survey of 3,000 to 5,000 nationally representative adults. The next round of research will be conducted in November 2013.

Decades of empirical research has demonstrated that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs best explains the values segments independently derived by CDSM from the extensive data sets. The theory provides for a dynamic understanding of the way national populations change their values over time – the changes measured by the British Values Survey.

The Maslow Groups and Values Modes are used in wide range of countries and a variety of companies and NGOs. International research, covering over 45 per cent of the world's population, has been conducted in nine countries in the last 18 months

An introduction to the development and use of Maslow Groups is contained in the book *What Makes People Tick* by Chris Rose (2011).





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