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Largest national providers of private and voluntary social care (March 2023)

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Applies to England

Contents

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Main findings

- The percentage of homes and places owned by the 10 largest private owners of children's homes remained at 30%.
- The 22 largest companies owned 977 homes, which is 40% of all private children's homes and 31% of all children's homes.
- Just 1 in 7 private children's homes (358, 15%) was a single provider that is not in the ownership chain of a larger company.
- Among privately owned independent fostering agencies (IFAs), 3 in 5 were single providers (172, 64%). The remaining 98 agencies were within the ownership chain of a company that owns 2 or more IFAs.
- Among the 98 privately owned IFAs that were within a company ownership chain, the majority (76) were owned by 7 large providers, owning 20,465 places.
- There are 4 companies that appear on the list of largest providers for children's homes and IFAs. These companies are: CareTech Holdings PLC, the Outcomes First Group (SSCP Spring Topco Ltd), Nutrius UK Topco Ltd (Polaris) and Compass Community Ltd.

Introduction

This release provides information about the ownership of children's homes and IFAs in England, as at 31 March 2023. Children's homes and IFAs run by the private and voluntary sector are the most common types of children's social care settings in England.

According to the latest available Department for Education data, there were 82,000 children looked after in England, as at 31 March 2022. Of these, nearly 37,000 were in private or voluntary sector placements.

This release also describes the picture of private and voluntary ownership across children's homes and IFAs, as at 31 March 2023. This includes information about the largest providers, which are the companies that own the largest number of children's homes or provide the largest number of fostering places through the IFAs they own.

These large providers looked after around 26,000 children in private and voluntary children's homes and IFAs – just under one third of all children in care in England.

We extracted the ownership data for this release from the ‘get information about a company’ tool on Companies House. The information on Companies House is provided by companies themselves, and neither Companies House nor Ofsted verify its accuracy. The company names used throughout this release are presented as at source.

There are some companies that also own other types of children’s social provision, such as: further education college with residential accommodation and residential special schools. However, we do not look at these in this analysis.

All children’s homes

As at 31 March 2023, there were 3,119 children’s homes of all types actively operating in England, offering 13,528 places for children.

This paper focuses on private ownership of children’s homes, as at 31 March 2023. Secure children’s homes, residential special schools registered as children’s homes and short-break-only children’s homes have been excluded from this analysis.

Children’s homes

Children’s homes (2,880) were the largest groups of homes (92% of all types of homes). These offered the largest number of residential places (10,818 places, 80% of all places).

More than 4 in 5 of these homes were owned by private companies (2,450 homes, 85%), which accounts for 8,791 places (81%). Of the remaining children’s homes, 333 (12%) were owned by the local authority (1,529 places, 14%), and 97 (3%) were owned by voluntary organisations (498 places, 5%).

There was a rise in the number of private sector homes, from 2,205 in 2022 to 2,450 homes in 2023. This 11% increase is in line with the 9% increase of all children’s homes. As a result, the proportion of homes owned by the private sector stayed fairly static from 2022 to 2023. The voluntary sector remained at 97 homes and the local authority sector went from 340 homes in 2022 to 333 homes in 2023 (a decrease of 2%).

Figure 1: Comparison of the sector breakdown of children’s homes, as at 31 March 2023 and 31 March 2022

View data in an accessible format.

Ownership of private children’s homes

There is a wide range of ownership among children’s homes. Some homes are single providers (existing as a single entity, not owned by a larger company). Others are nested within a larger company’s ownership chain. Some of these companies own only a few homes, but some own a considerably larger number.

As at 31 March 2023, a total of 334 private companies owned multiple homes. The majority of these (270 companies, 81%) owned between 2 and 5 homes each. The company with the most homes, CareTech Holdings PLC, owned 207. Because there is such variation in the number of homes that companies own, we have analysed the largest providers separately. We looked at how homes owned by these companies differ from all children’s homes nationally.

We have data, extracted from Companies House, on the ownership of 2,439 of the 2,450 private children’s homes. The remainder are owned by individuals, not companies, and have been excluded from the following analysis.

Of these 2,439 privately owned children’s homes, as at 31 March 2023:

- 358 (15%) were single providers
- 2,081 (85%) were owned as part of another top company with at least 2 homes
- 1,042 (50%) of the 2,081 homes were owned by companies that each owned 10 or more separate children’s homes; of these 1,042 homes, 977 (94%) were owned by just the 22 top companies

Overall, the top 10 companies accounted for 30% of all private children’s homes, in line with previous years. CareTech Holdings PLC – the largest – alone accounted for 8% of all private children’s homes.

Table 1: The 10 largest providers of private children’s homes, as at 31 March 2023, compared with 31 March 2022

Position	Position change	Top company	Number of children’s homes	Net change in number of homes	Places	Net change in places
1	Position unchanged	CareTech Holdings PLC	207	+2	681	+3
2	Increase from last year’s position	Keys Group Ltd(G Square Healthcare Private Equity LLP)	114	+9	431	+59

3	Decrease from last year’s position	Aspris Holdco Ltd	98	-10	344	-50
4	Position unchanged	The Outcomes First Group (SSCP Spring Topco Ltd)	61	+1	273	+1
5	Increase from last year’s position	Hexagon Care Services Ltd (Hcs Group Ltd)	51	+3	188	+7
6	Increase from last year’s position	Esland Group Holdings Ltd	47	+4	120	+2
7	Decrease from last year’s position	Range Topco Ltd	44	-6	146	-29
8	Increase from last year’s position	Compass Community Ltd	38	+10	201	+59
9	Position unchanged	Homes2Inspire Ltd (The Shaw Trust Ltd)	38	+6	135	-67
10	Position unchanged	Wordsworth Midco 1 Ltd (Witherslack)	37	+5	236	+119

The largest providers have generally continued to grow in terms of the number of homes owned and places provided. The greatest increase within the largest providers has been for Compass Community Ltd, with an increase of 10 homes (36% increase). Due to this increase, they moved to join the top 10 largest provider list in 8th position, while in 2022 they were in 11th.

The next companies, ranked 11 to 22 in terms of the number of children’s homes they own, are detailed in table 2.

Table 2: Next 11 largest providers of private children’s homes, as at 31 March 2023, compared with 31 March 2022

Position	Position	Top company	Number	Net change	Places	Net

	change		of children’s homes	in number of homes		change in places
11	Decrease from last year’s position	The Partnership Of Care Today (Care Today Children’s Services)	35	+2	125	+4
12	Increase from last year’s position	Nutrius UK Topco Ltd (Polaris)	32	+7	136	+36
13	Decrease from last year’s position	Ardenton Capital Ltd	26	-1	74	-2
14	Increase from last year’s position	Reflexion Care Group Ltd	20	+1	65	+14
15	Decrease from last year’s position	Meadows Care Holdco Ltd	20	0	64	0
16	Position unchanged	Time-out Children’s Homes Ltd	18	0	33	0
17	Increase from last year’s position	Blue Mountain Homes Ltd	17	+2	55	+4
18	Decrease from last year’s position	Phoenix Learning & Care Holdings Ltd (Ashridge Capital)	17	0	42	0
19	Decrease from last year’s position	Your Chapter Holdings Ltd (Care 4 Children Holdco Ltd)	15	-1	62	-3
20	Position unchanged	Ethelbert Specialist Homes Ltd	14	0	57	0

21	Position unchanged	Foundation Investment Partners Management LLP	14	0	44	0
22	New to the list of largest providers	First Blue Group Ltd	14	Not previously in data as top company	37	Not previously in data as top company

As at 31 March 2023, the number of largest providers has increased to 22 from 21 in 2022, as First Blue Group Ltd is a new addition this year. The 11th to 22nd largest companies owned 242 homes, which was only 35 more than CareTech Holdings PLC owned alone. Overall, the 22 largest providers owned 977 homes (40% of all private children's homes) this year. This was a 5% increase in 2023 compared with 929 homes owned by the top 21 largest providers in 2022.

Inspection outcomes for privately owned children's homes

As at 31 March 2023, the inspection profile for the 2,232 private children's homes with judgements was as follows:

- 218 (10%) were graded outstanding
- 1,555 (70%) were graded good
- 413 (19%) were graded requires improvement to be good
- 46 (2%) were graded inadequate

There were 207 homes that have not been inspected. A full discussion of children's homes inspection outcomes is available in our Children's Social Care in England 2023 national statistics.

This release includes inspection activity up to 31 March 2023 only. Settings that have been inspected since then may have grades that have improved or declined.

Figure 2: Grade profile of children's homes with inspection outcomes, as at 31 March 2023, split by sector

View data in an accessible format.

Ownership of voluntary children's homes

As at 31 March 2023, there were 97 voluntary owned children's homes (homes owned by charities or not-for-profit organisations). The breakdown of these was very similar to 2022:

- 20 (21%) were single providers
- 77 (79%) were owned as part of another top company with at least 2 homes
- 56 (58%) were owned by companies with 5 or more separate children's homes

Compared with the private sector, there were fewer large companies in terms of number of homes. Only one top company, The Together Trust, had more than 10 homes under its ownership.

Table 3: The 5 largest providers of voluntary children's homes, as at 31 March 2023

Position	Top company	Number of children's homes	Places
1	The Together Trust	11	47
2	Break	8	32
3	The Caldecott Foundation Ltd	7	42
4	St Christopher's Fellowship	7	41
5	Birtenshaw	6	21

Inspection outcomes

The latest full graded inspection outcomes for the 95 voluntary children's homes with judgements were as follows:

- 9 (9%) were graded outstanding
- 69 (73%) were graded good
- 17 (18%) were graded requires improvement to be good
- 0 (0%) were graded inadequate

This release includes inspection activity up to 31 March 2023 only. Settings that have been inspected since then may have grades that have improved or declined.

Independent fostering agencies

Most children in care (70%) are in foster care. This can be provided by either local authority fostering agencies or IFAs. According to our most recent statistics, just under half of fostered children (around 20,175) are fostered through IFAs.

As at 31 March 2023, there were 319 IFAs operating in England (excluding the 9 IFAs owned by trusts that operate on behalf of local authorities). This was a net increase of 3 IFAs (1%) from last year, when there were 316 IFAs. There were 14 joiners and 11 leavers this year. The 319 IFAs offered a total of 38,785 fostering places for children, as at 31 March 2023.

Data on the number of places provided by each IFA comes from Ofsted's annual fostering data collection. As the 2023 collection is ongoing, data included here reflects the 2022 returns. This means we do not know the number of places offered by the 14 agencies that registered during 2022 to 2023.

Private or voluntary organisations can own IFAs, but the majority are privately owned (272 IFAs, 85%). As at 31 March 2023, the 272 private IFAs offered a total of 34,955 fostering places (90% of all IFA places). Voluntary organisations accounted for the remaining 47 IFAs (15%) and offered 3,835 places (10% of all IFA places).

Figure 3: Proportion of IFAs and IFA places provided by the private and voluntary sector

View data in an accessible format.

The private sector has grown since 2022, with a net increase of 4 private IFAs. This is because of 14 registrations opening and 10 closing.

The new private IFAs accounted for all the IFAs registered in 2022–23; there were no new registrations within the voluntary sector. The number of voluntary sector IFAs fell by 1 this year, as 1 IFA closed. The private sector percentage of IFAs has remained at 85%.

Ownership of private IFAs

Although many IFAs are single providers not owned by a larger company, a number are nested within a larger company's ownership chain. Some of these companies own only a few IFAs, but some own a considerably larger number.

As at 31 March 2023, there were a total of 14 private companies that owned at least 2 IFAs. Because there is such variation in the number of IFAs that companies owned, and the number of fostering places they provided, we have analysed the largest providers separately.

As a result, throughout the following section of the release, we have described IFAs as having 3 different types of ownership:

- single provider: those IFAs that exist as a single entity and are not owned by a larger company
- small provider: those IFAs that are within the ownership chain of a small company. For this

release, we defined a small company as one that owns multiple IFAs but offers fewer than 1,000 fostering places through all of the IFAs it owns

- large provider: those IFAs that are within the ownership chain of a large company. For this release, we defined a large company as one that owns multiple IFAs and offers more than 1,000 fostering places through all of the IFAs it owns. This is consistent with the definition used in previous releases on this topic

When determining the size of companies, we chose to use the number of IFA places offered by each company, rather than the number of IFAs that it owns. This best captures the reach of a company, in terms of how many children it could offer care to. We calculated the total number of places a company offers as the sum of all places offered by all IFAs within its ownership chain. For example, if a company has 4 IFAs in its ownership chain, and each of these offered 25 places, the total places offered by the company is 100.

We have extracted data from Companies House on the ownership of all of the 272 privately owned IFAs. There were 2 agencies owned by individuals. These 2 agencies and the places they provided have been excluded from this dataset. Of the 270 IFAs, 172 (64%) were single providers, 22 (8%) were owned by 7 small providers and 76 (28%) were owned by 7 larger providers.

Most of the private IFAs were single providers. They accounted for only around a third (32%) of the 34,785 places provided by all private IFAs. The majority of private fostering places (59%) were provided by the 76 IFAs owned by large providers. The average of places for larger providers for 2023 was 270, lower than 280 in 2022. For small providers, the average number of places, 140, has increased from 125 in 2022. Single providers places have remained the same (65).

Figure 4: Number of private IFAs and private IFA places, as at 31 March 2023, by ownership type

Number of IFAs excludes 2 agencies for whom there was no data available on Companies House.
View data in an accessible format.

In the private sector, small providers accounted for the smallest number of IFAs (22, 8%) and places (3,070, 9%). The total combined number of places offered by all small providers was smaller than that of each of the 3 largest providers.

The largest private providers of IFA places

There were 7 private companies that offered over 1,000 fostering places and are therefore included in our list of largest providers. These 7 providers accounted for 59% of all private IFA places in England as at 31 March 2023 (20,465 out of 34,785 places).

Table 4: The largest providers of private IFA places, as at 31 March 2023, compared with 31 March 2022

Position	Position change	Top company	Number of IFA places, 2023	Change in number of IFA places since 2022
1	Position unchanged	The Outcomes First Group (SSCP Spring Topco Ltd)	6,285	-205
2	Position unchanged	Nutrius UK Topco Ltd (Polaris)	5,045	-555
3	Position unchanged	Compass Community Ltd	3,485	+970
4	Position unchanged	Alderbury Holdings Ltd (Lindale Holdings Ltd)	2,075	+75
5	Position unchanged	Capstone EOT Trustee Ltd	1,290	-160
6	Increase from last year's position	Five Rivers Ireland Ltd	1,270	+55
7	Decrease from last year's position	CareTech Holdings PLC	1,015	-260

Of the 7 large providers, 4 offered a smaller number of places in 2023 than in 2022, mostly due to agencies closing.

Small private providers of IFA places

In addition to the 7 large providers, there were 7 smaller private companies that owned 2 or more IFAs each. These small providers accounted for 22 IFAs (8% of all privately owned IFAs) and 3,070 places (9% of all private IFA places). The number of IFAs owned by these companies ranged from 2 to 6, and the total number of places provided through their IFAs ranged from 130 to 835.

Table 5: Small providers of private IFA places as at 31 March 2023, compared with 31 March 2022

Position	Position change	Top company	Number of IFA	Change in number of IFA

			places, 2023	places since 2022
8	Position unchanged	Swiis International Ltd	835	-55
9	Position unchanged	Sunbeam Fostering Agency Ltd	825	+75
10	Position unchanged	Fusion Fostering Ltd	535	+45
11	Increase from last year's position	Positive Aspirations Ltd	295	+5
12	New to the list of small providers	Mainspring Fund Services Ltd	285	Not previously in data
13	Increase from last year's position	Young People At Heart Ltd	160	+10
14	Increase from last year's position	Futures For Children Ltd	130	-105

Inspection profile of the largest private providers of IFAs as at 31 March 2023

We are required by regulations to inspect IFAs at least once within a 3-year inspection window. Agencies judged inadequate or requiring improvement to be good are usually re-inspected within a shorter timeframe.

Private IFAs are similar in good and outstanding judgements (96%) to voluntary IFAs (91%). The largest private providers of IFAs contribute 29% of good and outstanding judgements. The majority of IFAs owned by large providers (97%) that had received an inspection grade as at 31 March 2023 were good or outstanding. The same was true for IFAs owned by private small providers, all of which were good or outstanding.

This release includes inspection activity up to 31 March 2023 only. Settings that have been inspected since then may have grades that have improved or declined.

Ownership of voluntary IFAs

There were 47 voluntary IFAs, which had 3,835 places between them.

Of the 47 voluntary IFAs that were active as at 31 March 2023, 21 (45%) were single providers. The remaining 26 (55%) were within the ownership chains of 6 companies. This is a different pattern of ownership to that seen in the private sector, where around 64% of IFAs were private single providers.

All 6 of the voluntary companies that owned multiple IFAs offered fewer than 1,000 fostering places in total, so are considered small providers. All but one of them had fewer than 400 places. The 26 voluntary IFAs that were owned by small providers accounted for more than half of all fostering places provided by voluntary IFAs (2,265, 59%).

Figure 5: Proportion of IFAs and IFA places provided by voluntary and private IFAs, by ownership type

Number of private IFAs excludes 2 agencies for whom there was no data available on Companies House.

View data in an accessible format.

The number of IFAs owned by each voluntary small provider ranged from 2 to 7. The total number of places provided by these providers ranged from 105 to 800. The biggest voluntary company, The Adolescent and Children's Trust, owned 7 IFAs and provided the most places with 800 places (35% of all voluntary places).

Table 6: Small providers of voluntary IFA places as at 31 March 2023, compared with 31 March 2022

Position	Position change	Top company	Number of voluntary places, 2023	Change in number of voluntary places since 2022
1	Position unchanged	The Adolescent and Children's Trust	800	-115
2	Position unchanged	Barnardo's	375	-110
3	Position unchanged	Team Fostering	375	-5
4	Position unchanged	The Children's Family Trust	370	+15
5	Position unchanged	Action For Children	240	-35
6	Position	St Christopher's	105	-25

unchanged Fellowship

Inspection profile of voluntary IFAs owned by small providers and single providers, as at 31 March 2023

IFAs owned by voluntary small providers that are outstanding and good (24 out of 26) have decreased from 100% in 2022 to 92% in 2023. The remaining 2 are requires improvement to be good, which is an increase of 8 percentage points in 2023 compared with 0% in 2022.

Companies among the largest providers of children's homes and IFA places

There are 4 companies that appeared on both lists of largest providers for children's homes and IFAs. These were: CareTech Holdings PLC; Outcomes First Group (SSCP Spring Topco Ltd); Compass Community Ltd; and Nutrius UK Topco Ltd (Polaris).

- CareTech was the largest provider of children's homes (207 homes, offering 681 places), and the 7th largest provider of IFA places (3 IFAs, offering 1,015 places).
- The Outcomes First Group (SSCP Spring Topco Ltd) was the 4th largest provider of children's homes (61 homes, offering 273 places), and the largest provider of IFA places (24 IFAs, offering 6,285 places).
- Compass Community Ltd was the 8th largest provider of children's homes (38 homes, offering 201 places), and the third largest provider of IFA places (7 IFAs, offering 3,485 places).
- Nutrius UK Topco Ltd (Polaris) was the 12th largest provider of children's homes (32 homes, offering 136 places), and the second largest provider of IFA places (24 IFAs, offering 5,045 places).

These 4 companies accounted for: 14% of private children's homes; 15% of private children's home places; 21% of private IFAs; and 45% of private IFA places.

Contacts

If you are a member of the public and have any comments or feedback on this publication, contact Emma Martin (emma.martin@ofsted.gov.uk) or the social care and area SEND analysis team (socialcaredata@ofsted.gov.uk).

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Annex: data tables for figures

This section contains the underlying data in an accessible table format for all figures.

Data for Figure 1: Comparison of the sector breakdown of children's homes as at 31 March 2023 and 31 March 2022

As at date	Total number	Private	Voluntary	Local authority
As at 31 March 2023	2,880	2,450	97	333
As at 31 March 2022	2,642	2,205	97	340

See Figure 1

Data for Figure 2: Grade profile of children's homes with inspection outcomes as at 31 March 2023, split by sector

Sector	Total number	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement to be good	Inadequate
Private	2,232	218	1,555	413	46
Voluntary	95	9	69	17	na

See Figure 2

Data for Figure 3: Proportion of IFAs and IFA places provided by the private and voluntary sector

Data item	Total number	Private sector	Voluntary sector
Percentage of providers	319	85%	15%
Percentage of places	38,785	90%	10%

See Figure 3

Data for Figure 4: Number of private IFAs and private IFA places as at 31 March 2023, by ownership type

Data item	Total number	Single provider	Small provider	Large provider
Number of IFAs	270	172	22	76
Number of places	34,785	11,250	3,070	20,465

See Figure 4

Data for Figure 5: Proportion of IFAs and IFA places provided by voluntary and private IFAs, by ownership type

Data item	Total number	Single provider	Small provider	Large provider
Private IFAs	270	64%	8%	28%
Private IFA places	34,785	32%	9%	59%
Voluntary IFAs	47	45%	55%	na
Voluntary IFA places	3,835	41%	59%	na

See Figure 5

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